Xylitol Explained

Everyone has bacteria in their mouth. The sugars and starches in the foods you eat feed the bacteria, allowing them to produce acids that attack tooth enamel. The breakdown of the enamel can lead to tooth decay and cavities. The good news is that researchers have found that xylitol can make it harder for bacteria to adhere to the teeth.

Xylitol is a naturally occurring sweetener that is used in place of sugar. It is just as sweet as sugar but contains 33 percent fewer calories. It can be used in preparation of diabetic meals, by those sensitive to sugar and by people interested in reducing their added sugar intake.

The sweeteners in xylitol interfere with the growth of bacteria and reduce the acids—therefore, protecting your teeth. Researchers conducted a study with three groups of people to find out how xylitol works. The first group chewed a standard sorbitol-sweetened gum. The second group chewed no gum. And the third group chewed a xylitol-sweetened gum. After three months, the group who had chewed the xylitol-sweetened gum had the least amount of bacteria in their mouths.[1]



Most stores now offer gums with xylitol, but they're most often combined with other sweeteners. These gums still provide benefits, but experts say it's best to chew gum with xylitol as the only sweetener.

Did you know?

Xylitol is derived from birch tree bark.

Quick bites[2]

- If you love chewing gum, make sure it's a sugar-free variety.
- Sugar-free gum made with xylitol can help aid in the fight against cavities.
- The best time to chew gum is 20 minutes after eating or drinking.
- Chewing sugar-free gum increases saliva flow in the mouth which helps wash away new and existing bacteria in the mouth.

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1. Hildebrandt, GH and Brandon SS, "Maintaining Mutans Streptococci Suppression: With Xylitol Chewing Gum," *Journal of the American Dental Association* 131, no. 7 (2000): 909–16. **2.** American Dental Association, "Chewing Gum to Prevent Cavities," web.

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