

Did you know that gum chewing can actually be good for you?

You may have heard of Xylitol (zi-la-tol) – a sugar substitute that is not only low in calories but also helps kill bacteria associated with dental decay.

Xylitol is a Food and Drug Administration approved sweetener, sometimes referred to as sugar alcohol. It is found in several food and personal health items – including gum, candy, mouthwash and toothpaste.



So how does it work? Xylitol affects the bacteria that cause dental decay. The bacteria ingest the Xylitol, just as they would other sugars, but they are unable to process Xylitol, so they die. This lowers the amount of plaque-producing bacteria and therefore reduces the presence of dental decay.

The positive benefits of Xylitol include a good taste and one-third less calories than regular sugar, so it's a great option if you are monitoring sugar intake.

Most dental professional would agree that Xylitol is not a cure-all for dental problems. However, combined with proper brushing, flossing, regular dentist visits and a healthy diet, chewing Xylitol gum for 5 minutes, 3 to 5 times a day can potentially reduce dental decay by 35 to 70 percent.

Chewing gum with Xylitol:

- Reduces decay-promoting acids
- Prevents the growth and spread of bacteria that cause dental cavities
- Helps reduce oral plaque levels
- Promotes remineralization (hardening) of enamel

If you chew gum, the next time you pick up a pack, read the label and see if Xylitol is listed as the first ingredient; if it is, the Xylitol content is enough to be effective.

If you don't chew gum or have been advised by your dentist to avoid chewing gum due to jaw pain, look for other products containing Xylitol.

Along with a good dental care regimen, chewing gum with Xylitol can help you have healthy teeth.