

## Gum Chewing Prevents Decay

Some of you may remember the old Dentyne Chewing Gum commercial "*Brush your breath, brush your breath, brush your breath with Dentyne*" and "*When you can't brush chew Dentyne*". That commercial was aimed at getting us to buy Dentyne Gum to keep our breaths fresh.

Well, it turns out that if you did chew Dentyne, particularly after eating, you not only freshen your breath but most likely reduced the chances of getting tooth decay. Yes, it's now well documented chewing gum particularly sugar free gum after eating can reduce tooth decay up to 40% when done in conjunction with a regular brushing and flossing routine.

Sounds a little too good to be true, doesn't it? Well, it is true, and this is how it works; chewing gum stimulates saliva flow up to 10 times the normal resting rate. Saliva is our own natural defense against many ailments of the oral cavity including dental decay. It cleans the mouth by washing away food debris which is the fuel that plaque uses to produce the cavity causing acids. Saliva also dilutes the acid that has already formed making it less effective and saliva helps in a third way, by bringing calcium and other minerals to repair the damaged enamel.

You might remember the article in this column in August of 2007 on the artificial sweetener, Xylitol; entitled "Sweetener Xylitol proven to prevent cavities" in this article we discussed how the artificial sweetener Xylitol has actually been shown to inhibit the bacteria that forms plaque. Chewing gum that has been sweetened with at least 75% or more of Xylitol (100% is better) gives you the dual action of inhibiting the bacterial

plaque growth and increasing flow of saliva; thus making this chewing gum much more effective. There are several products available commercially that are made with 100% Xylitol including mints, chewing gum and even mouthwashes. These products can be found on the internet, and in some dental offices, some drug store and some health food stores. There is even a snowball stand here in Lafayette that features organic Xylitol sweetened snowballs.

So the old Dentyne commercial was not far from wrong and in fact was giving good advice when it said *"When you can't brush chew Dentyne"*.

Some words of caution; first, chewing gum is not meant to replace brushing and flossing, but is to be used as another tool in the fight against tooth decay. Remember sugar free gum, particularly that sweetened with Xylitol is the most effective. Also, chewing gum can be a choking hazard in young children and people with Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) or other jaw related problems should not take up chewing gum without consulting their dentist.

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