

Sweetner Xylitol Actually Proven to Prevent Cavities

Xylitol is a sweetener made from naturally occurring plant products and has been very safe in humans. It has been in use since the early 60's for diabetic patients and other medical users such as infusion for shock and burn patients. In the 70's researchers in Finland discovered when 100% Xylitol was used as a sweetener in gum it had a very significant effect on the decay process. They proved by chewing gum sweetened with 100% Xylitol 3-7 times a day reduced significantly the number of cavities that were experienced. Xylitol reduces the occurrence of decay in three separate ways; it disrupts the formation of plaque, reduces acid formation and inhibits the growth of cavity causing bacteria. Another good feature of Xyllitol is that as it has long lasting effects. It was discovered that chewing Xylitol gum daily for two years, the reduction of cavities was evident up to 6 years later.

It has been proven that the cavity causing bacteria is usually inoculated in children by the primary care providers, which usually is the mother. This occurs by kissing, tasting and other intimate contact the mother has with the infant. This usually occurs by the time the child is three to four months old. The research indicates that if mothers with newborns chewed Xylitol gum 2-3 times a day until the child is about two years old it reduced the chance that the child would be inoculated by the cavity causing bacteria and significantly reduced the chance of the child getting cavities. Xylitol is available in gums, mints, lozenges, mouthwashes and even toothpaste, though gum has been shown to be the route that is most effective in reducing cavities, and only in the case where it is chewed consistently three to four times a day and for an extended period of time.

In my practice, we have been recommending the use of Xylitol gel on gums and teeth of newborns and infants up to 6-8 months. We encourage mothers who are pregnant to have their teeth checked and clean regularly and start chewing Xylitol Gum or using mints flavored with Xylitol shortly after the child's birth and try to extend this through the first couple of years of the child's life.

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) supports preventive strategies that disrupt plaque formation and inhibit growth of cavity causing bacteria. Xylitol has been shown to be a useful agent in this strategy. More research is necessary to confirm the effectiveness of Xylitol in products other than gum.

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