



## Xylitol and Your Teeth — A Great Combination!

Xylitol is a naturally occurring sweetener. It is a sugar alcohol that is found in fruits, berries, mushrooms, lettuce, hardwoods, and corncobs. In addition, our bodies make up to 15 grams of xylitol a day. Spoon for spoon, xylitol in crystal form can be used to make cookies, cakes, and other “safe” sweet treats. It looks and tastes just like sugar.

Xylitol has been shown to lower your risk of getting cavities.<sup>1</sup> When you eat a sugary or starchy food, including healthy foods such as bread, milk, or potatoes, the bacteria eat the sugar and produce acid. The acid eats away at your tooth to cause a hole, or a cavity. When you chew a piece of gum with xylitol in it, the bacteria in your mouth prefer to eat xylitol instead of the sugars. Bacteria can't use xylitol for energy like they can sugar, but they really like how xylitol tastes and keep trying to eat it. The sugar gets left alone and no acid is made. **No acid = no cavities!**

Xylitol reduces harmful, cavity-causing bacteria. It also helps prevent dental plaque (bacteria) from sticking to the teeth.<sup>2</sup>

### Who should consume xylitol?

Xylitol was recommended for the use of children by the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry in 2006. Both children and adults can consume xylitol products. Kids as young as 2 can use xylitol breath sprays. In order to use the mints or gum, kids should be able to keep the product in their mouth for at least five minutes. Parents and care givers can help lower the levels of bacteria they pass on to babies by consuming xylitol products.<sup>3</sup> This reduces the risk of the children getting cavities as their baby teeth come in.

Xylitol is a great sweetener for people with diabetes. It is absorbed slowly by the body so the rise in blood glucose is less than with sugar. Xylitol only has 2.4 calories per gram compared to sugar, which has 6 calories per gram.

### How much?

Studies show that **6 to 8 grams** of xylitol per day is very effective.<sup>4</sup> It's easy to keep track of your xylitol intake. The “100% xylitol” mints and gums contain about one gram of xylitol in each piece. You could begin with as little as one piece four times a day for a total of four grams. Thirty grams a day is the safest maximum amount to consume. More than that may give you an upset stomach.

### How to use xylitol

It is not necessary to replace all sweeteners to get the dental benefits of xylitol. Look for xylitol sweetened products that encourage chewing or sucking to keep the xylitol in contact with your teeth. The best items have xylitol listed as the first ingredient.

### How often?

Use xylitol at least 3 but preferably 5 times every day.

### When to use?

Use xylitol **immediately after eating**. Clear the mouth by rinsing with water first, if possible. Between meals, replace ordinary chewing gum, breath mints, or breath spray with xylitol products.

### Where to purchase?

Smiles in Motion has gum and toothpaste available for purchase. You can find xylitol-sweetened gum such as Ice Breakers “Ice Cubes” and Trident with xylitol at most grocery stores or at Wal-Mart, Shopko, Target, and Walgreens stores. Tic Tac “Chill” Exotic Cherry flavor mints are sweetened with xylitol as well. Online resources sell products such as xylitol-sweetened baby teeth wipes, toothpaste, mouth rinses, and crystal form (sugar-looking) xylitol. Below are some web sites for you to check out.

[www.xlear.com](http://www.xlear.com)

[www.epicdental.com](http://www.epicdental.com)

[www.xylitolnow.com](http://www.xylitolnow.com)

[www.globalsweet.com](http://www.globalsweet.com)

### References

- <sup>1</sup> Kandelman D., Gagnon G. A 24-month clinical study of the incidence and progression of dental caries in relation to consumption of chewing gum containing xylitol in school preventive programs. *J. Dent. Res.* 1990; 69:1771.
- <sup>2</sup> Isotupa K.P., Gunn S., Chen C.Y., Lopatin D., Makinen K.K. Effect of polyol gums on dental plaque in orthodontic patients. *Am. J. Orthod. Dentofac. Orthop.* 1995; 107: 497.
- <sup>3</sup> Isokangas P., Soderling E., Pienihakkinen K., Alanen, P. Occurrence of dental decay in children after maternal consumption of xylitol chewing gum, a follow-up from 0 to 5 years of age. *J. Dent. Res.* 2000; 79: 1885.
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**Amanda Spitz, DDS, Pediatric Dentist**  
583 Lakeland Drive, Chippewa Falls, WI 54729  
t 715-723-2000 | [www.sim4kids.com](http://www.sim4kids.com)