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Dentistry for Infants, Children & Adolescents

Frequently Asked Questions About Xylitol

- 1. Why is xylitol special?** It is an FDA- approved sugar substitute that is both anticavity and antiplaque.
- 2. What is xylitol?** Xylitol, a 5 carbon sugar alcohol, is widely distributed throughout nature in small amounts. Some of the best sources are fruits, berries, mushrooms, lettuce, hardwoods and corn cobs. One cup of raspberries contains less than one gram of xylitol.
- 3. Why are xylitol containing gum and lozenges so special?** Xylitol, when used by bacteria (*streptococcus*) as a food, decreases their ability to stick to the surfaces of the teeth and then reduces their ability to form dental plaque. It also reduces the acid-producing potential of the bacteria (*streptococcus*), which is the leading cause of tooth decay according to the Acid Theory of Dental Decay.
- 4. Does xylitol reduce dental plaque?** Yes. You can tell this after a few days by the smooth glassy feeling that your teeth will have when you touch them with your tongue. The feeling of the smoothness is similar to that of an ice cube melting in your mouth.
- 5. Does xylitol reduce the risk of cavities?** Yes. Studies have shown that there has been as much as an 80% reduction in tooth decay over an extended period of usage compared to the groups not chewing xylitol-containing gum. Using xylitol as a sugar substitute or a small dietary addition has demonstrated a dramatic reduction in new tooth decay along with the reversal of existing dental caries. Xylitol provides additional protection that enhances all existing prevention methods. This effect is long lasting and possibly permanent. Low decay rates persist, even years after the trials had been completed.
- 6. Who should use 100% xylitol chewing gum?** Xylitol can be used by anyone who is concerned about fighting dental decay and dental plaque. Children should begin using the gum as soon as they are old enough to responsibly chew gum. Expectant mothers (and any relatives that will have contact with the newborn) should begin chewing the gum during the pregnancy thus reducing the chance that they will pass on the bad bacteria to the newborn child by sharing food or kissing. Significantly fewer cavities occurred in the children when their mothers chewed 100% xylitol-sweetened gum during and after pregnancy.
- 7. How often does my child need to use xylitol?** Best results are achieved when the gum is chewed 3-5 times per day, after each meal or snack and ½ hour before bedtime.
- 8. How long does my child need to chew xylitol?** Chew it for at least 5 minutes but chewing it longer will not cause harm. You should chew it for as many months or years as desired to have the benefits of its cavity- and plaque-fighting qualities.
- 9. Are there other advantages to chewing 100% xylitol gum?** Yes. The gum may reduce bad breath, and studies have also shown that there can be up to a 40% reduction in ear infections. If your child suffers from frequent ear infections, you can further reduce their risk by using a xylitol- containing nasal wash.
- 10. Can my child stop brushing and flossing his/her teeth?** No. Maintain a good oral hygiene routine of regularly brushing and flossing.
- 11. Can my child stop visiting my dentist?** No. Maintain regular dental visits for cleaning and fluoride treatments and other recommended preventive careS.
- 12. Does my child need fluoride?** Yes, xylitol is just another tool that is recognized to be effective against tooth decay.
- 13. Can my child eat anything that he/shes want once he/she starts chewing the xylitol gum?** No. You should still carefully watch your child's intake of high-density carbohydrates (sugar) and avoid sugar- and acid- containing juice and waters.
- 14. Is xylitol safe to use?** Yes. Our bodies normally produce about 15 grams of xylitol each day. There have been no reported side effects when used as directed, i.e., 4-12 grams per day. A person who exceeds 30 grams per day may experience some lower gastrointestinal discomfort for a few days (osmotic diarrhea) if they are xylitol-sensitive individuals.

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