

# Sweet Talk

Xylitol is a sugar alcohol sweetener that is found in birch tree bark, beets, corncobs, raspberries, mushrooms, and other natural sources. Its sweetness is equal to that of sugar, but it has about 40 percent fewer calories, making it a popular sugar-free substitute. Xylitol not only cuts calories, it also cuts cavities!

## How does xylitol prevent cavities?

Xylitol helps prevent *Streptococcus mutans*, the primary bacterium associated with dental caries, from attaching to teeth and tissues in the mouth. Xylitol cannot be metabolized by bacteria; as a result, the process that creates harmful, enamel-eating acids is drastically slowed.

Regular use of xylitol has been shown to help reduce dental plaque—the first stage of cavity development, tartar formation, and tooth staining—and promote better oral health.

## How often must I use xylitol for it to be effective?

Xylitol is a natural and convenient way to supplement daily dental care. Xylitol gum or mints used three to five times daily (for a total intake of 5 grams) is considered optimal. Because frequency and duration of exposure is important, gum should be chewed for approximately five minutes and mints should be allowed to dissolve. Dentists



recommend using xylitol immediately after meals and snacks to help reduce plaque, inhibit adhesion of bacteria to the teeth, and reduce contact time of sugar on teeth.

## Has xylitol been evaluated for safety?

Yes. Human consumption of xylitol has been confirmed for safety by a number of agencies, including the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the World Health Organization's Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives, and the European Union's Scientific Committee on Food. Pet owners should note, however, that xylitol is harmful to dogs. To prevent xylitol poisoning, dog owners should be

aware of products that contain xylitol as a sweetener, and keep those products out of the reach of their dogs.

## What products contain xylitol and how do I find them?

Products containing xylitol have been available in the United States for a number of years, but only recently has its use become mainstream. Today, xylitol can be readily found in chewing gums, toothpastes, mouthwashes and other oral care products, candies, and some pharmaceuticals. On food labels, xylitol is classified broadly as a carbohydrate and more narrowly as a polyol. To learn more about xylitol products, talk to your dentist.

## Resources

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

Brought to you by the AGD, this Web site answers important dental health questions, offers the latest information on current treatments, provides tips for first-rate oral hygiene, and it can help visitors find highly qualified general dentists near where they live.

## 1.877.2X.A.YEAR

AGD's toll-free referral number. Call to locate an AGD member dentist in your area.

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