



Helping Hands

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WHAT IS XYLITOL?

Xylitol is a natural sugar alcohol that is found in vegetables and fruit. It also occurs naturally in our bodies. An adult can produce up to fifteen grams of xylitol a day. It has been used as a natural sweetener for the past ten decades and has a good taste, with sweetness equal to sugar. It contains 40% fewer calories than other carbohydrates, so insulin is not needed to metabolize xylitol making it a safe sugar substitute for people with diabetes.

Xylitol is shown to inhibit the growth of *Streptococcus mutans*, the bacteria that causes cavities. With xylitol use over time, the quality of these bacteria in the mouth change and fewer decay causing bacteria survive. Less plaque forms, and the levels of acids attacking the tooth surface is lowered. The effects of Xylitol's decay-preventing qualities are only when used as a part of one's overall strategy for decay reduction including a healthy diet and proper home care.

Xylitol is found most often in chewing gum and mints, such as the Spry brand, but is found in other products as well. Health food stores are a good place to find products containing xylitol, as well as the internet. For the amount of xylitol to be at decay-preventing levels, however, it must be listed as the first ingredient in a product. Gum or mints used three to five times daily, for a total intake of five grams, is considered optimal. If xylitol is used in more than this amount stomach irritation can occur. Frequency and duration of exposure to teeth is important. Gum should be chewed for approximately five minutes and mints should be allowed to dissolve completely.

Xylitol has been approved for safety by a number of agencies, including the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and has received official endorsements from six national dental associations.