



# News Release

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## **Sugar Substitute Sweet On Cavity Fighting** *Xylitol Products Can Sweeten Foods, Fight Tooth Decay*

Consumers looking for additional ways to fight cavities and promote their oral health may have found a friend in an increasingly popular sugar substitute.

Xylitol is an all-natural sweetener found in many fruits and vegetables that tastes and looks like sugar. Studies have shown it reduces the amount of teeth-eating acid produced by bacteria in the mouth. By doing something as easy as chewing gum containing xylitol four times a day, consumers can help decrease the likelihood of getting cavities and enhance their oral health.

“The beneficial effects of xylitol go beyond anything delivered by eating foods made with other sugar substitutes. Using xylitol products in conjunction with a good program of oral hygiene gives consumers one more weapon in the fight against cavities,” said Scott Navarro, DDS, a national oral health advisor for Delta Dental Plans Association.

Discovered by a German chemist in 1891, xylitol is commonly used as a sugar substitute in many European and Asian countries. Researchers in Finland first discovered the oral health benefits of xylitol in the early 1970s. Since then, xylitol’s benefits have been well-documented.

In a study conducted over a three and one-half year period<sup>1</sup>, researchers tracked tooth decay in more 1,000 school children. Researchers compared decay rates in kids who did not chew gum against those who chewed a variety of gums. Gums containing xylitol were the most effective in reducing caries rates. Another study,<sup>2</sup> which followed 500 children for two years, found that the progression of existing cavities was stopped more frequently among those children who chewed xylitol gum.

Today, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration officially lists xylitol as a food additive permitted for direct addition to food for human consumption. Its use by manufacturers as a sugar substitute – it contains approximately 40% fewer calories than sugar – has been limited because it is more expensive to produce than artificially created sweeteners like aspartame.

Consumer products containing xylitol include chewing gum, mints, mouthwash, toothpaste, bulk powder and candies. Gum containing xylitol is more widely available in the United States than other xylitol products. Look in the gum and candy section or the oral hygiene aisle of most drug or grocery stores to find gum with labels that list xylitol as an ingredient.

“By adding the use of xylitol products to the things we are already doing to protect our teeth, we can further work to reduce cavities as a source of discomfort to the health of our teeth and finances,” Dr. Navarro said.

Delta Dental Plans Association, based in Oak Brook, IL, is a national network of independent not-for-profit dental service corporations specializing in providing dental benefits programs to 46 million Americans in more than 80,000 employee groups throughout the country.

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<sup>1</sup> Makinen KK, Bennett CA, Hujoel PP, Isokangas PJ, Isotupa KP, Pape HR Jr. Xylitol chewing gums and caries rates: a 40-month cohort study. *J Dent Res* 1995 Dec;74(12):1904-13

<sup>2</sup> Makinen KK, Makinen PL, Pape HR Jr, Allen P, Bennett CA, Isokangas PJ, Isotupa KP, Stabilisation of rampant caries: polyol gums and arrest of dentine caries in two long-term cohort studies in young subjects. *Int Dent J* 1995 Feb; 45(1 Suppl1):93-107.