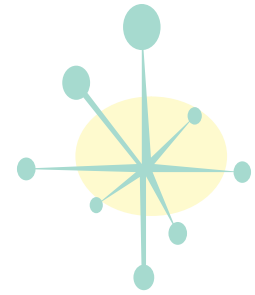


FROM THE PAGES OF

YOUR ORAL HEALTH

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CHOW CHOW!

Go ahead, have a piece of (sugarless) gum and make your dentist happy

Chewing gum is thought to be the world's oldest candy — we've been chomping down on it for more than 5,000 years! But what do dentists think of all that chewing? While the people who care for our teeth aren't usually fans of candy, when it comes to sugarless gum, most dentists give it the nod.

"Chewing sugarless gum is a great way to help stimulate saliva flow in patients with dry mouth," says Dr. Deborah Saunders, *Your Oral Health.ca's* Editor-in-Chief. That salivary stimulation also helps protect your teeth from decay-causing bacteria, so if you aren't able to brush your teeth after eating, chewing sugarless gum can help.

Dr. Rick Caldwell, ODA President (2013-14), agrees. "Chewing sugarless gum can help freshen breath in the short term; although gum doesn't bleach the teeth, it can help remove some surface stains."

Who shouldn't chew gum?

"Patients with temporomandibular joint disorders (TMJD) shouldn't chew gum as this may make their condition worse," says Dr. Saunders, Medical Director of the Dental Oncology Program at Northeast Cancer Centre in Sudbury, Ont. (See *TM-what?* for more on TMJD.)

Adds Dr. Caldwell, a general practitioner in New Liskeard, Ont., "With

TMJD problems, the joint requires rest, not extra use. Also, people with facial muscle spasms shouldn't chew gum, and, for those with sensitive teeth, depending on the source of their sensitivity, chewing gum can be quite uncomfortable."

One last point: If you've had orthodontic work done, such as implants, or if you wear a denture, you may want to talk to your dentist before opting to chew gum, since some gum will stick to orthodontic and acrylic work.



Xylitol 101

Xylitol is a naturally occurring sweetener used in many foods, including chewing gum. Unlike sugar and other sweeteners, says Dr. Saunders, xylitol cannot be digested by the plaque-causing bacteria in our mouths, which, in turn, reduces the amount of plaque on our teeth. For best results, she recommends looking for gum that contains at least one gram of xylitol per piece. But, Dr. Saunders also has a few warnings:

- **Xylitol can be toxic to dogs**, so keep your chewing gum away from Fido.
- When starting to chew xylitol, meeting the recommended five to 10 grams per day should be done **gradually over a period of several weeks**, to allow the gastrointestinal system time to adjust.
- Since it can cause diarrhea and intestinal gas, people with **inflammatory bowel diseases**, such as irritable bowel syndrome or Crohn's disease, **should avoid xylitol**.

Trivia to sink your teeth into

Ancient Greeks chomped on a gummy tree resin called *mastiche*, from the mastic tree; the Mayans of South American favoured *tsictle*, a natural latex from the sapodilla tree; and native North Americans preferred resin made from spruce tree sap.

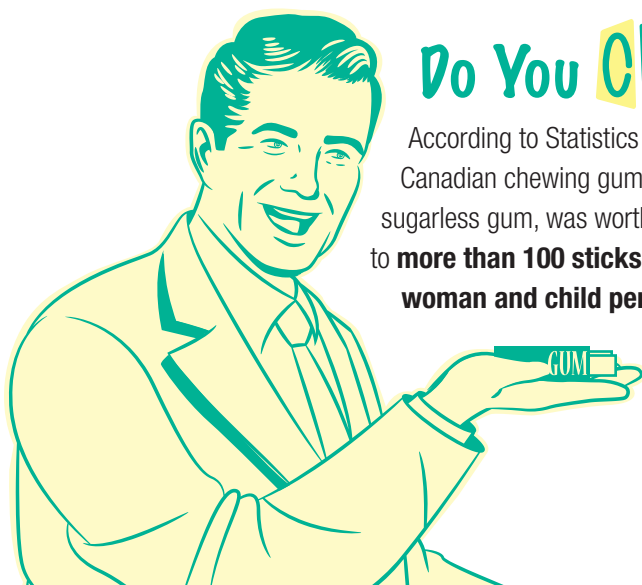
In the 1870s, while American inventor Thomas Adams was experimenting to see if *tsictle* (called "chicle" in the United States) could be a replacement for rubber, he found that heating it with sugar and flavourings created a chewing gum superior to the paraffin wax-based ones then popular. Adams patented it and launched Black Jack, America's first flavoured gum, in 1884.

The recipe for modern chewing gum usually includes a synthetic gum base of polymers, resins or waxes mixed with a softener, like glycerin or vegetable oil, plus sweetener, flavour and colour. Yum!

Just remember: chewing gum containing sugar can be harmful to teeth and may lead to cavities.

TM-What?

TMJD (temporomandibular joint disorder) may involve pain in the joint and muscles of the jaw. Some of the causes include arthritis or jaw injuries. If you experience pain in your jaw, see your dentist immediately.



Do You CHEW?

According to Statistics Canada, in 2008 the Canadian chewing gum market, which includes sugarless gum, was worth \$400 million. That works out to **more than 100 sticks of gum for every man, woman and child per year**. Sound like a lot? Well,

Americans each chew 300 sticks of gum a year!

Myth Buster

Despite what your mom may have told you, if you swallow chewing gum it doesn't take seven years to digest. Sure, the gum base isn't easily digested, but your gut will send it on its way like everything else you eat.

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