ORAL FITNESS FACT SHEET

Fight Tooth Decay with Xylitol

You brush and floss your teeth daily, visit the dentist every year for an exam and a cleaning, avoid sugary foods and treats, and drink fluoridated water. Do you also have to give up chewing gum or mints?

No! In fact, some gum or mints can actually give you ***more*** protection if they contain a sugar called xylitol (zy-li-tol). It is a natural sweetener found in fruits and vegetables such as yellow plums, strawberries, and raspberries. It is usually made from certain hardwoods such as the birch tree.

How does xylitol work?

- Blocks bacteria from producing the acids that cause tooth decay.
- Decreases the level of cavity-causing bacteria.
- Decreases plaque formation.
- Enhances remineralization (hardening) of weakened teeth.

Because it fights bacteria so well, people who chew xylitol gum can reduce their risk of cavities. This is especially important for deployed Soldiers who may be at higher risk of tooth decay if they are not able to brush regularly and eat meals with high amounts of carbohydrates (starch), such as Meals-Ready-to-Eat (MREs).

Other reasons to chew xylitol gum

1. It is safe for the whole family.
2. Has 40% less calories than sugar.
3. Makes your mouth feel fresh and cool.
4. Tastes as sweet as sugar with no aftertaste.
5. You can buy it at the candy counter.
6. It is a natural sweetener.
7. It relieves “dry mouth” by increasing saliva.
8. It can reduce ear infections.

How can I get the most benefit from xylitol?

- Chew 1.5 – 2 grams of xylitol gum for 5 minutes, 3 to 5 times a day.
- Chew xylitol gum after meals or as a snack.
- Xylitol-sweetened mints can be used by people who can’t or prefer not to chew gum.

How do I find gum or mints that contain xylitol?

Read the label. Xylitol should be the first ingredient listed on the label before other sweeteners. If you can’t find xylitol gum or mints at your PX or Commissary, ask the manager to order them.

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