

What happens if you swallow chewing gum?

From the sweeties.net wiki

Chewing gum is designed to be chewed, not swallowed. But gulp one down by accident and nothing dramatic happens. Here is what actually goes on.

Part of it you do digest

A piece of gum is not all gum. Much of it is sugar or sweetener, flavourings and softeners, and those dissolve in your saliva as you chew, which is why gum loses its taste. By the time you have been chewing for a while, what is left is mostly the gum base: the stretchy part that gives gum its chew.

The gum base passes straight through

Gum base is made of polymers that repel water. That is what lets gum survive being chewed for so long: saliva cannot break it down. Your stomach cannot either. Swallowed gum is not metabolised, broken down or absorbed like normal food.

But being indigestible does not mean it gets stuck. Plenty of things we eat are not fully digested and pass through anyway. Swallowed gum moves along the gut with everything else and leaves the body in your stools. An expert at McGill University's Office for Science and Society puts the average time food takes to pass through the gut at a little over 24 hours, and swallowed gum usually passes within a day or two.

So is the seven year story true?

No. There is no evidence that swallowed gum stays in your stomach for seven years, and nobody seems to know where the story came from. We look at the myth in detail in [does chewing gum stay in your stomach for seven years?](#).

When it can be a problem

There is one real, but rare, risk. If someone, usually a young child, swallows a lot of gum regularly, it can clump together with other things in the gut and form a mass that will not pass, called a bezoar. Doctors have described a four year old boy with two years of constipation who had been given gum as a reward and always swallowed it, five to seven pieces a day. In another case, an eighteen month old girl swallowed gum and four coins, which stuck together in her gullet.

These cases are unusual, and they involved large amounts of gum swallowed often. They are the reason for the sensible advice: do not make a habit of swallowing gum, and do not give gum to young children who do not yet understand that it is not for swallowing.

What to do

- **You swallowed a piece by accident:** nothing. It will pass.
- **A child swallowed a piece:** usually nothing, but explain that gum goes in the bin, not down.
- **A child swallows gum often, or has swallowed a lot and has tummy pain, vomiting or constipation:** speak to a doctor or call NHS 111.

To find out what is actually in gum, see [what chewing gum is made of](#).

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