

Is chewing gum good for your teeth?

From the sweeties.net wiki

The answer depends on one word on the packet: sugar.

How teeth decay

Tooth decay is caused by acid. Bacteria in the mouth feed on sugar and food debris on the surface of the teeth, and as they do, they make acid that dissolves the hard outer layers of the tooth. Simple sugars are these bacteria's main source of energy, which is why a diet high in sugar is a risk. Saliva works in the other direction, helping teeth recover. Decay happens when the damage outpaces the repair.

Gum with sugar

Ordinary gum is sweetened with sugar, and while you chew it you are bathing your teeth in sugar for several minutes at a time. That is food for exactly the bacteria that cause decay. Sugary gum is not good for teeth.

Sugar free gum

Sugar free gum is a different story. The sweeteners it uses, such as sorbitol, maltitol, xylitol and aspartame, have been found not to cause tooth decay. And the act of chewing itself helps: it gets saliva flowing, which washes food and bacteria off the teeth. The American Dental Association says chewing sugar free gum for 20 minutes after a meal helps prevent tooth decay. Some studies suggest that most of the benefit comes from the chewing and the extra saliva, rather than from any special ingredient.

Xylitol

Gum sweetened with xylitol has been shown to reduce cavities and plaque. Xylitol works against *Streptococcus mutans*, one of the main bacteria behind tooth decay. The sweetener sorbitol has a similar benefit, but is only about a third as effective. Some gums also add ingredients meant to help repair tooth enamel, with mixed results in studies.

Fresher breath

Chewing gum also helps with bad breath, not just by adding a minty smell but by stimulating saliva, which washes the mouth. It can help people who suffer from a dry mouth too.

What gum cannot do

Gum is a helper, not a replacement. It does not clean between teeth or remove plaque the way brushing does, so keep brushing twice a day and see your dentist regularly. And one important warning for dog owners: xylitol is poisonous to dogs, so keep sugar free gum well out of their reach. See [can dogs eat](#)

[chewing gum?](#).

For sweets and teeth more generally, see [sweets and teeth](#).

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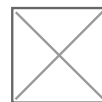
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