

Sugar free sweets and polyols

From the sweeties.net wiki

Sugar free sweets swap sugar for other sweeteners, commonly polyols, also called sugar alcohols. They taste like sugar, but the body handles them differently, which brings both benefits and drawbacks.

What the claims mean

UK law sets strict conditions for sugar claims on food:

- **Sugars free:** no more than 0.5 g of sugars per 100 g.
- **Low sugars:** no more than 5 g of sugars per 100 g.
- **No added sugars:** no added sugars, or any other food used for its sweetening properties. If sugars occur naturally, the label must also say contains naturally occurring sugars.

A sugar free sweet is not calorie free. On labels, polyols are counted at 2.4 kcal per gram, compared with 4 kcal per gram for sugar and other carbohydrates. The exception is erythritol, which is counted as zero.

The main polyols compared

| Polyol | Sweetness compared with sugar | ---|---| | Sorbitol, E420 | About half as sweet | | Maltitol | 75 to 90 per cent as sweet | | Xylitol, E967 | About as sweet | | Erythritol | 60 to 70 per cent as sweet |

As a group, polyols are less sweet than sugar and have slightly less energy, so they are often combined with intense sweeteners. Some give a cooling feeling in the mouth when highly concentrated, which you may notice in sugar free boiled sweets and chewing gum: see [what are sugar free sweets made with?](#)

The benefits

- **Teeth.** Polyols are not fed on by the bacteria in the mouth, so they do not contribute to tooth decay: see [sweets and teeth](#)
- **Blood sugar.** Xylitol has little effect on blood sugar, because the body processes it without insulin, and erythritol does not affect blood sugar: see [sweets and diabetes](#)

The catches

- **Laxative effects.** Polyols are not fully absorbed, so eating a lot can cause wind and diarrhoea. By law, sweets with more than 10 per cent added polyols must say excessive consumption may produce laxative effects: see [why do sugar free sweets carry a laxative warning?](#)

- **Dogs.** Xylitol is poisonous to dogs, so keep sugar free sweets and gum away from them: see [can dogs eat sweets?](#)
- **Other sweeteners.** Sweets made with aspartame must say they contain a source of phenylalanine: see [how to read a sweet label](#)

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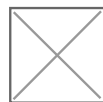
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