

## **The Pros and Cons of Chewing Gum**

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Now, perhaps this particular brand of gum paid a lot of for the nice plug, but it got us wondering, are there really any good reasons to chew gum? Prior to the popularity of sugar-free gum, we always heard that chewing gum caused cavities. Now we hear that chewing certain kinds of gum may actually prevent them. And what about TMJD (temporomandibular joint disorder)? Let's try and sort fact from fiction.

Recent studies have revealed interesting stats on gum chewing. For example, chewing gum can with concentration and recall. It does appear to be true. Researchers from England found that chewing gum can help a person to stay alert and concentrate. These researchers also found that chewing gum helped to relieve tension and anxiety.

As far as helping to reduce snack cravings, there are mixed reviews. Some research has suggested that chewing gum may help reduce snack cravings. Other research suggests that chewing gum has the opposite effect. Chewing gum for extended periods of time can cause digestive enzymes to be produced. Over a period of time this may stress out the pancreas, leading to a less digestive process and possible health consequences as a result.

Other problems with gum can stem from the type of sweetener used. Full on sugar-sweetened gum has been shown to increase the incidence of dental caries (cavities). Chewing sugar-sweetened gum immerses the teeth in sugar and will promote dental decay and possibly other problems associated with high sugar intake. Aspartame-containing gums may cause headaches or other negative reactions. Only xylitol-sweetened gums (labeled sugar-free) have been shown to positively impact dental health in terms of cavity prevention. And it is somewhat difficult to find gums that are only sweetened with xylitol. Other (sugar-free) sugar alcohols that may be used in gum include sorbitol and mannitol, which have not been shown to prevent tooth decay or dental caries. One of the other ways that gum may benefit dental health is that chewing gum stimulates an increase in the production and flow of saliva. Saliva washes the teeth and can help buffer against bacteria that can erode enamel and also cause cavities.

One of the problems with consuming alcohol sugars is that they have been known to cause increased intestinal gas. Chewing gum may cause people to take in more air as they chew, which can also increase gas in the stomach. Who ever thought that their chewing gum was making them gassy? It's almost like bad breath for another problematic situation.

Frequent gum chewing may also bring about or aggravate TMJD, which can cause severe aching in the jaw, neck and face. The constant chewing involved with gum chewing puts the jaws under constant

stress and for some people this can lead to a painful situation. TMJD is characterized by acute or chronic inflammation of the temporomandibular joint (think jaw and chewing).

On a more positive note, chewing gum can help balance the pressure within the ear while flying at altitude by increasing swallowing due to increased saliva. For some people, chewing sugar-free mint gum may also decrease or relieve symptoms of heartburn.

Gum chewing is definitely a personal choice. It is much preferred over smoking. And if it keeps you from overindulging, then we say go ahead and chew gum until your tendency to want to go for another bag of chips goes away. Sugarless is a much better choice than sugar - if you are choosing a xylitol based gum (and keep these away from you dogs as xylitol is toxic to dogs). A sure sign to avoid chewing gum is if you are having frequent headaches or any jaw or neck pain. In this case we definitely recommend you visit your physician or dentist as soon as possible.