



Xylitol

A Natural Alternative to Sugar and Artificial Sweeteners

Too much of a good thing can be harmful, and that's especially true when it comes to sugar. Although sugar is a major energy source for the body, the excess consumption of one sugar has led to an epidemic of obesity and diabetes, which is affecting not only older people, but young children as well. Furthermore, excess sugar consumption triggers the release of excess insulin, which has been linked with increased inflammation and the development of degenerative diseases like heart disease and cancer.

Most of us know we should eat less sugar, but it's hard to give up our sweets, even if we know they're ruining our health. To satisfy their sweet tooth, without the calories, many people turn to artificial sweeteners like aspartame and sucralose to satisfy their cravings. Unfortunately, these artificial sweeteners have a dubious safety record and often create health problems of their own.

Fortunately, there is a natural alternative to refined sugar that has recently been introduced into the American marketplace. This product is a form of sugar, but one with both a long safety record and some great health benefits.

We're talking about xylitol. Xylitol is a sugar alcohol. (Don't worry, this has no relationship to the alcohol you drink—it's just a chemical structure.) This sugar is usually made from the fibers of corn husks or birch tree bark, but can also be found in beets, oats, certain mushrooms and some fruits and vegetables.

Xylitol has been used in Europe and China for over twenty years and has an excellent track record for safety. It has about the same sweetness as table sugar (sucrose) so it can substituted for equal amounts of sugar in most cases. It does have caloric value, but it has 40% fewer calories than sugar. So, eating xylitol instead of sugar immediately cuts down your caloric intake without sacrificing sweetness.

Even better, xylitol has been shown to actually have some health benefits. For starters, xylitol has a glycemic index of 7, which means it does not trigger insulin production. (By reference, refined sugar has a glycemic index of 100.) This means that xylitol can be used safely by both hypoglycemics and diabetics.

But, the benefits of xylitol don't stop there. The bacteria which cause cavities and gum disease can't live on xylitol. This means that using xylitol regularly will actually reduce cavities and prevent gum disease.

Even better, xylitol helps the body bind calcium, which actually aids remineralization of the teeth and bones. So, it is helpful for creating strong teeth and preventing osteoporosis.

Xylitol also inhibits the bacteria that cause middle ear infections and sinus problems. It also helps reduce unfriendly bacteria in the intestines.

Yeast can't live on xylitol, either, which means it isn't good for making yeasted breads. (That's one of the few applications you can't use xylitol in place of sugar.) However, that's not bad news, because it also means that xylitol doesn't feed Candida and other yeast infections. Instead, it actually helps the body get rid of yeast—and that's good news!

Xylitol increases saliva production. So, it is helpful for people who experience dry mouth. It can also improve bad breath problems.

Best of all, consumed regularly, xylitol actually balances blood sugar and reduces carbohydrate cravings. That means, it can help you break your addiction to refined sugar and simple carbohydrates without sacrificing your need for something sweet occasionally. This makes it very helpful for weight loss programs.

Xylitol is available in bulk for cooking and baking. Use it just like sugar in most recipes.

Chewing gum made with xylitol has been shown to help prevent cavities. Xylitol gum is available in two flavors (Cinnamon and Spearmint). For added benefits, a xylitol mouthwash is also available.

As a substitute for candy, there are two flavors of mints, peppermint and lemon. There are also two flavors of great tasting dark chocolate bars, Calcium Crunch and Cardio Raspberry. Chocolate is one of nature's most powerful antioxidants. So, without the refined sugar, a good dark chocolate bar can actually be good for you. The Calcium Crunch chocolate bars supply calcium and other nutrients for bones and teeth. The Cardio Raspberry bars contain antioxidants and heart-healthy nutrients.

If you have a hard time kicking the sugar habit, try xylitol. It's one way to have your sugar, and be healthy, too.

Selected References

The Sweet Miracle of Xylitol by Fran Gare, N.D.

Sweet Death by Hugo Rodier, M.D.

Sweeten Your Life the Xylitol Way by Karen Edwards

Healing Sugars DVD by Tree of Light Publishing, featuring Steven Horne and Kimberly Balas

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