



Xylitol

Xylitol is a safe, low-glycaemic sugar.

With all the recent press about the dangers of certain sugar-substitutes, Xylitol presents a welcome relief. It is not only healthy (it is good for the teeth and low-glycaemic) but tastes and looks identical to normal sugar except for a slight cooling effect on the tongue (there is absolutely no bitter after taste as there is with some sugar substitutes).

Xylitol is a white crystalline sweetener that occurs naturally in berries, fruit, vegetables, mushrooms and birch trees. In fact, in Finland it is known as "birch sugar", because the principal raw ingredient in its manufacture is xylan or wood fibre. It is even found naturally in our bodies, and has been shown to be completely non-toxic and safe to take (unlike many other alternative sweeteners).

Recently, Xylitol has become very popular as a sugar substitute because it has been shown to help reduce tooth decay and even help reverse it when it is already present. It can do this because of its molecular structure, which makes it unusable by the mouth bacteria that cause dental caries – plaque cannot grow with it. Also, as saliva that contains Xylitol is alkaline (the pH is above 7), the calcium and phosphate salts in our saliva can start to naturally remineralize our tooth enamel in the places that they are lacking, which has a hardening effect on decay-softened enamel. It can be used as a healthy sugar substitute, or just taken orally and swished around the mouth for good dental care.

One of the added benefits of Xylitol is the fact that it is both a low-glycaemic sweetener and alkalizing to the body, making it an ideal sugar substitute for those on weight-loss diets and for those wanting optimum health without the "sugar-blues". (Xylitol, however, is not a low or no calorie product — each teaspoon or 4g contains 9.6 calories as opposed to normal sugar's 15.8 calories for the equivalent weight.) As it is low-glycaemic, it has become popular as a sweetener for diabetics and those interested in Syndrome X.

Another benefit for children is that if they use xylitol, he or she may get fewer ear infections. Children should use the gum or syrup every day, whether they are ill or not.

A recent exciting study has shown that osteoporosis may be another condition for which Xylitol may be of help. In studies in Finland in 1994, Xylitol was shown to be able to maintain bone density in rats that had their ovaries surgically removed. Without ovaries, oestrogen levels in these rats plummeted – and so did the bone density in the rats that were not given Xylitol. However, in ovariectomized rats, which had been given Xylitol, bone density actually increased. This early study strongly indicated that Xylitol might help maintain bone density in normally aging intact (non-'surgerized') animals. Now, this conjecture has apparently been confirmed. A recent report by the same team of Finnish scientists evaluated the effect of Xylitol on bone volume and bone mineral content in aged male rats, reinforcing their earlier study on female animals.

The Really Healthy Company's Xylitol is 100% pure-grade white crystalline powder made from hard wood (not corn)

Web: www.healthy.co.uk Tel: 0845 370 3040

Perfect Sweet is available from health stores and is made from corn. Web: www.perfectsweet.co.uk

XyloBrit is available from www.healthproductsforlife.com

