

## Enjoy candy without the cavities thanks to a UCLA professor of dentistry

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What Willy Wonka did for chocolate, UCLA microbiologist Wenyuan Shi is doing for lollipops.

Because of Shi, thousands of orange-flavored lollipops are rolling out of a factory in Grand Rapids, Mich., into the hands of people eager to lick them for one reason only. Shi and his lab team at the School of Dentistry have managed to make candy that's actually good for your teeth. The orange-flavored, sugar-free lollipop they devised is infused with a natural ingredient found in licorice that kills the primary bacterium causing tooth decay, *Streptococcus mutans*.

Marketed as Dr. John's Herbal Candy, the lollipop, now available for purchase through a candy manufacturer that licenses the technology

from UCLA, is the first therapeutic developed by Shi. But he has many more in the works to target bacteria wreaking havoc in the nose, ear and gut, to name just a few.

It all emerges from a vision the microbiologist had eight years ago to apply a medical approach to dentistry - to identify the decay-causing pathogens among the 700 kinds of bacteria living in the human mouth, track their presence and then target them with antimicrobial "smart bombs" that he and his lab would engineer to kill the bad bacteria without harming the good.

And he's also working on kits to test for these devilish pathogens. "Part of my wild dream is that one day you will walk into the dentist's office and give a saliva sample to be tested, just as you would give urine and blood samples to doctors," said Shi, a professor with joint appointments in UCLA's dental and medical schools.

Source: UCLA

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