

Gummy bears that fight plaque

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The tooth-protecting sugar substitute xylitol has been incorporated into gummy bears to produce a sweet snack that may prevent dental problems. Research published today in the open access journal *BMC Oral Health* describes how giving children four of the xylitol bears three times a day during school hours results in a decrease in the plaque bacteria that cause tooth decay.

Xylitol is a naturally occurring sugar alcohol that is frequently used as a sweetener. It has been shown to reduce levels of the harmful *mutans streptococci* (MS) bacteria that are known to cause tooth decay. While xylitol chewing gums are available, they are not considered to be suitable for younger children.

This research was led by Kiet A. Ly from the University of Washington. He says, "For xylitol to be successfully used in oral health promotion programmes amongst primary-school children, an effective means of delivering xylitol must be identified. Gummy bears would seem to be more ideal than chewing gum."

The children in the study were given four bears three times a day, containing different concentrations of xylitol. The results show that after six weeks of gummy bear snacking, the levels of harmful MS bacteria in the children's plaque was significantly reduced. According to Ly "Based on our findings, it is feasible to develop a clinical trial of a gummy-based caries prevention programme. Such a study is now being carried out in the East Cleveland primary school district (Ohio, USA)."

Tooth decay is one of the most common diseases in the world. The distribution of Xylitol gummy bears in the school setting may help to reduce the burden of this foremost chronic childhood disease in Europe and the US.

Source: BioMed Central

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