

Chewing gum before surgery safe, report says

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It's not encouraged, and food and drink still not OK, experts say.

(HealthDay)—It's safe to chew gum while fasting before surgery, researchers report.

Patients are usually told not to eat or drink before surgery to prevent complications while they're under anesthesia, but it wasn't clear if the same was true for chewing gum.

This new study included 67 patients who underwent gastrointestinal endoscopic procedures. About half the patients were allowed to chew gum until just before the start of the procedure, with no limit on the amount or type of gum, or duration of chewing. The other patients did not chew gum.

The patients who chewed gum had significantly increased volume of

fluids in the stomach compared to those who didn't chew gum. But it was still safe to administer sedatives or anesthesia to the patients who chewed gum, according to the study to be presented Sunday at the annual meeting of the American Society of Anesthesiologists, in New Orleans.

"The effect of chewing gum on fasting has been a subject of debate, and unsuspecting patients who chew gum before surgery may face cancellation or delay of their procedure," study author Dr. Basavana Goudra, an assistant professor of clinical anesthesiology and critical care at the University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine, said in a society news release.

"We found that although chewing gum before surgery increases the production of saliva and thus the volume of stomach liquids, it does not affect the level of stomach acidity in a way that would elevate the risk of complications," Goudra said.

According to the news release, the ban on eating and drinking before anesthesia reduces the risk of pulmonary aspiration—a serious complication in which stomach contents are pulled into the respiratory tract during breathing. Typically, chewing gum is not allowed before surgery.

"While we wouldn't actively encourage gum chewing in patients presenting for procedures involving anesthesia, in the absence of other aspiration risk factors, patients who inadvertently chew gum should not face cancellation or delay of a surgery or procedure with anesthesia," Goudra said.

Research presented at medical meetings should be viewed as preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

More information: The American Association of Nurse Anesthetists

has more about [anesthesia](#).

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