

## **ADJUNCTIVE AIDS FOR PREVENTING CAVITIES**

### ***Xylitol***

#### **What is xylitol?**

*An alternative sweetener that helps prevent cavities.*

▫Xylitol is a naturally occurring sugar alcohol that can be utilized as an alternative sweetener in gum and mints as well as in regular cooking and baking. Although it feels and tastes like real sugar, it has 40% fewer calories and 75% fewer carbohydrates than sugar.

#### **How does xylitol prevent cavities?**

*By inhibiting the growth of bacteria that cause cavities*

▫These bacteria, strains of *Streptococcus mutans* in particular, cannot utilize the xylitol to grow, so their development is inhibited. With time and continued exposure to xylitol, the quality of the bacteria in the mouth changes as fewer and fewer cavity causing bacteria survive on tooth surfaces. Regular use of xylitol by mothers has even been shown to reduce the transmission of cavity causing bacteria to young and new-born children.

#### **Is xylitol safe?**

Yes.

▫It is approved for use by the FDA, The World Health Organization's Joint Expert Committee on Food Additive, as well as the European Union's Scientific Committee for Food. At levels far higher than recommended for cavity reduction, xylitol has been reported to act like fiber and have a mild laxative effect. Note, however, that xylitol is toxic when consumed by dogs and should thus be kept away from them.

#### **How often should xylitol be used?**

*Optimally, 3-5 times daily, for a total intake of 5 grams.*

▫Gum should be chewed for approximately 5 minutes and mints should be allowed to dissolve completely to maximize xylitol exposure to your teeth.

#### **Which gums and mints contain adequate xylitol?**

▫*Available in our office* – Epic Gums & Mints

▫*Available in most stores* – Ice Breakers Ice Cubes, Smints (Check ingredients, ideally, xylitol should be listed first).

### ***Fluoride***

#### **What is fluoride?**

*A naturally occurring compound that helps prevent tooth decay.*

▫Found in almost all natural water sources, it is the ionic form of the element fluorine

#### **How does fluoride prevent cavities?**

*By fortifying the surface tooth structure.*

▫Fluoride makes the tooth structure more resistant to the acid produced by bacteria that cause cavities. When a child ingests fluoride at the appropriate level during development, fluoride is incorporated throughout the entire developing tooth. When used in toothpaste and mouthwash, the effects are from the fluoride incorporating into just the outer layer of your teeth. There is some evidence that fluoride may also inhibit the growth of cavity causing bacteria.

#### **Is fluoride safe?**

Yes.

▫As with other nutrients, fluoride is safe when used and consumed properly. With fluoride in toothpaste and mouthwash, it is not swallowed, and the risks of toxicity are greatly reduced.

#### **How often should fluoride be used?**

*Twice daily.*

▫Generally, twice daily is sufficient. What varies is how much fluoride is needed. If you have cavities or are at a high risk for getting new cavities, prescription strength toothpaste, with 5 times more fluoride than over the counter toothpaste, may be helpful. Over the counter fluoride mouthwashes are also available. Try to avoid rinsing with water after using mouthwashes and toothpastes that contain fluoride.

#### **Which toothpastes and mouthwashes contain fluoride?**

▫*Available in our office or by prescription* – Fluoridex, Prevident 5000

▫*Available in most stores* – All toothpastes that have the ADA seal of approval. ACT mouthwashes, Listerine Total Care mouthwash.