

Xylitol: Not as Sweet As It's Cracked Up to Be

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Xylitol is truly the darling of sugar substitutes today. The American Dietetic Association touts its use, with this sugar alcohol sold alone and as a sweetener in a variety of processed foods. Health benefits include a reduced glycemic response compared with sucrose, increased absorption of B vitamins and calcium, and even a reduction in dental caries risk.

Consequently, people with blood sugar issues are flocking to processed foods containing this alternative sweetener as a way to satisfy that sweet tooth without the downside of exacerbating the risk factors for Metabolic Syndrome. This condition is known for the markedly increased likelihood of developing heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes.

Even the healthfood community almost universally considers this sugar alcohol to be a healthy substitute for sugar. A primary reason is because it doesn't directly contribute toward the growth of intestinal yeasts aka Candida.

Have you noticed that the check out aisles at healthfood stores are typically loaded with chocolates and other sweets containing at least some xylitol? The truth is that I have yet to talk with any healthy conscious person who suggests to me any downside other than the potential for intestinal cramps if you get too much.

Xylitol is Naturally Found in Nature

Xylitol is, after all, a naturally occurring substance. Manufacturers of xylitol market it as derived from xylan. The fibers of many plants contain it, including berries, oats, beets, sugar cane and birch. Sounds pretty harmless at first glance.

The FDA has even granted xylitol GRAS (Generally Recognized As Safe) status. You can't get any safer than that, right?



How Xylitol is Manufactured

It is true that xylitol is a naturally occurring substance. However, manufactured xylitol is another matter entirely. Food manufacturers produce it using the industrialized process of sugar hydrogenation. In order to hydrogenate anything, a catalyst is needed. In this case, Raney nickel is used which is a powdered nickel-aluminum alloy.

This poses the risk of heavy metal residue and contamination. Nickel, by the way, is a recognized carcinogen and aluminum is associated with development of dementia. Heavy metals in the body are notoriously difficult to eliminate with frequent use of infrared sauna probably a good idea.

This alternative sweetener doesn't seem quite so warm and fuzzy anymore, does it?

There is currently no literature on any detrimental health effects of consuming hydrogenated sugar. However, food manufactures widely used hydrogenated fats for decades before the very damaging effects to cardiovascular health became widely known!

Given the violent industrialized process that is required to produce a hydrogenated sugar like xylitol, it would seem wise to avoid it based on the very poor track record of hydrogenated foods in general.

Most Xylitol Sourced from GMO Corn

While it is true that xylitol can be derived from the xylan of birch trees, xylan is also found in corn cobs. It is much cheaper to use corn instead of birch bark to derive xylitol and so what do you think manufacturers prefer? Corn of course.

Therefore, unless the label of a xylitol containing product specifically notes that it is from birch or another nonGMO source, xylitol is very likely from genetically modified corn or possibly GMO sugar beets. This is the same problem as high fructose corn syrup (HFCS) and white sugar from beets, which food manufacturers widely use in sodas and sports drinks.

You get a dose of GMOs with every sip! More on GMO dangers including sterility and stomach holes at the provided link.

Xylitol Contributes to Gut Imbalance

The digestive process does not break down sugar alcohols like food. Rather, xylitol arrives intact into the intestines.

At that point, a process called “passive diffusion” takes place. This means that the xylitol draws water *into* the bowels. Only partial breakdown is the end result. The unmetabolized portion ferments providing the perfect environment for undesirable bacteria to thrive and grow.

It is true that xylitol itself does not feed candida directly like sugar does. As a result, this artificial sweetener is even promoted as a useful part of the Candida Diet.

Unfortunately, the fermentation of undigested xylitol in the gut most definitely can exacerbate yeast problems. Don't be fooled by this argument!

This is exactly why consuming xylitol can make some folks so gassy and even trigger cramping and diarrhea. Gut pathogens having a heyday in your intestines give off a lot of smelly toxins!

Other Little Known Problems with Xylitol

Xylitol can contribute to acid reflux problems. As a result, those who have issues in this area should avoid it for that reason alone. Chronic acid reflux is a serious problem that

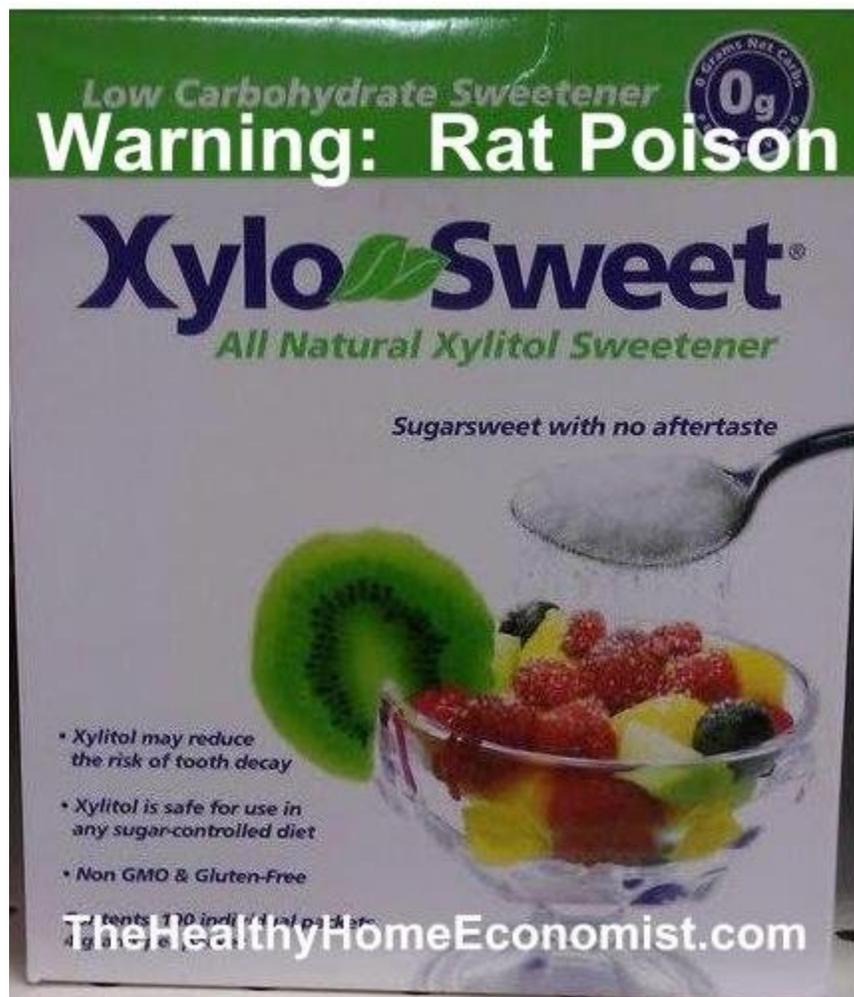
can lead to cancer of the esophagus and larynx.

In addition, those who suffer from seizures of any kind should stay away from this alternative sweetener as it can increase the frequency of epileptic attacks.

Xylitol in Two Pieces of Gum Can Kill a Rat

According to lab tests, approximately 1.65 grams of xylitol kills a 100 gram rat half the time.

Two little pieces of xylitol gum contain about .7 – 1 gram. This is probably enough to meet the definition of rat poison.



Xylitol for Preventing Cavities

Many people are chewing xylitol gum due to compelling scientific evidence for cavity prevention. What about for children, however?

Rami Nagel, author of Cure Tooth Decay, doesn't even recommend xylitol gum for this purpose. His research for any long term safety data turned up the following:

- Epidemiology: No information found

- Teratogenicity: No information found
- Reproductive Effects: No information found
- Mutagenicity: No information found
- Neurotoxicity: No information found

In summary, using this modern substance officially renders you a guinea pig my friend! It seems that any benefits of cavity prevention are outweighed by the fact that there is no actual safety data backing up its use.

Xylitol Benefits?

Given all the problems that consumption of xylitol can trigger, it seems best to bypass use of this sugar substitute on a regular basis.

Can it ever be helpful? Does it have any benefits whatsoever?

Potentially so. The only time I personally would ever consider using xylitol is to help resolve a childhood ear or sinus infection in order to prevent the use of drug based antibiotics.

There is evidence that this popular sugar alcohol can indeed help encourage a healthy balance of beneficial bacteria found in the ear canal and sinus cavities. A therapeutic dose can help resolve an infection in these areas quickly with no medication required.

Thus, if you choose to use it, make sure it is sparingly and therapeutically (not as a food). Also make sure it does not come from a GMO source like corn!

Sarah

The Healthy Home Economist holds a Master's degree from the University of Pennsylvania. Mother to 3 healthy children, blogger, and best-selling author, she writes about the practical application of Traditional Diet and evidence-based wellness within the modern household. Her work has been featured by USA Today, The New York Times, ABC, NBC, and many others.

