

Reaching beyond teeth

Xylitol helps with sinus and ear infections

By Dona Gabzdyl, RDH, BS, MBA

As a child, I hardly remember going on vacation without ending up in an emergency room with an ear infection — usually accompanied with a terrible head cold. As an adult, I suffer from chronic sinusitis, which eventually leads to a major ear infection.

Just this past summer, I acquired a debilitating sinus infection that lasted eight full weeks. After three doctors, a CT scan and several spectrums of antibiotics, the pressure in my left ear was so intense I had no choice but to endure a myringotomy (a surgical incision to the eardrum) to relieve the intense pressure.

I am no stranger to ear surgery. Seven years ago, I experienced another major sinus infection followed by six months of debilitating vertigo. I was diagnosed with a perilymphatic fistula — an abnormal opening between the middle and inner ear. As a clinical hygienist, I

am elated to find that xylitol is not only essential in caries control and prevention but that xylitol also contains additional benefits in preventing sinus and ear infections — an epiphany for me!

Whoever thought dental caries, sinus and ear infections could be prevented with candy? Xylitol, a naturally occurring, low-calorie sugar substitute derived from birch and other plant sources, is proven to decrease *Streptococcus mutans* levels in saliva and plaque. While xylitol creates an unwelcome environment for bacteria to adhere on teeth, it carries an additional benefit in preventing these other infections.

Two studies performed on more than 1,000 Finnish children who chewed xylitol gum resulted in a 40 percent reduction in acute otitis media. Six to eight grams of xylitol three to five times every day is all it takes to prevent ear infections.

This year, the Chicago Dental Society Midwinter Meeting welcomed Utah-based Xlear® (pronounced “clear”), manufacturer of xylitol-rich products including the Spry® Dental Defense System®, which includes gum, mints, candy,

toothpaste, tooth gels and oral rinses. Xlear sinus and ear infection prevention products include Xlear-Nasal Spray for adults and children, Spry Children’s Pacifier and Spry Rain Oral Mist.

Brand new is the NetiXlear® neti pot system to be used in nasal irrigation, recommended by Dr. Mehmet Oz on “The Oprah Winfrey Show” and incorporating the traditional nasal and sinus cleansers of sea salt and sodium bicarbonate with xylitol. The xylitol wash gently irrigates mucus membranes, washing away airborne contaminants while decreasing the nasal coagulase-negative Staphylococcus more than compared to saline wash alone. Products are available online and in stores. Visit the Xlear Web site at xlear.com/spry.aspx.

I incorporate the safe, natural sweetener in my clinical practice armamentarium knowing that xylitol significantly reduces the incidence of dental caries. How fortunate for me to practice in a profession that helps so many; I can also breathe a big sigh of relief trusting that Xlear will prevent me from future surgeries.

About the author



With more than 20 years in the dental profession, Dona Gabzdyl, RDH, BS, MBA and president of Strategic Practice Consultants, Inc.,

provides dental practices individualized, professional practice management expertise. She is a professional speaker presenting on topics such as communication and new products and technologies. She practices clinical hygiene in Arlington Heights, Ill., and is a 2009 graduate of CareerFusion. Contact her through her Web site: www.StrategicPracticeConsultants.com.

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