Can Chewing Gum Clean Your Mouth? | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/can-chewing-gum-really-clean-your-mouth/

Details:

Sugar-free chewing gum can support your oral health, but it does not replace brushing and cleaning between your teeth. At Core Dental we explain it this way: chewing increases the flow of saliva, and saliva helps protect your mouth. Stimulated saliva can flow at around 10 to 12 times the rate of resting saliva, washing away sugars, acids and bacteria and helping to neutralise acid. The key is that the gum is sugar-free, and that it is used alongside regular care.

Why does chewing gum help your mouth?

Chewing gum improves oral health mainly because the act of chewing stimulates your salivary glands. The glands produce more saliva, and that extra saliva gives your mouth several protective benefits. This works only with sugar-free gum, because gum containing sugar feeds the bacteria that cause decay.

What benefits does increased saliva flow provide?

More saliva reduces the risk of tooth decay, gum disease and fungal infections. It also helps the fit of dentures and makes speaking, chewing and swallowing food easier. Saliva is one of your mouth's natural defences, which is why a dry mouth can raise the risk of problems.

How does saliva help prevent tooth decay?

Saliva physically washes food and bacteria out of the mouth. This reduces the sugars, acids and bacterial build-up that lead to decay. By lowering these components, it helps bring the mouth back to balance. Saliva also contains natural antimicrobial substances such as lysozyme, peroxidase and lactoferrin, which injure bacteria and prevent their growth.

How does saliva neutralise acid in the mouth?

Acids in the mouth come from bacteria as a by-product, or from the diet, for example soft drinks, citrus and wine. These acids break down tooth structure and lead to decay. Saliva buffers acids because it contains bicarbonate and buffering proteins such as sialin. A faster flow also dilutes acids, which helps prevent loss of tooth structure.

How does saliva help repair teeth?

Calcium and phosphorus are minerals that form part of your teeth. When the mouth becomes more acidic, these minerals can dissolve out of tooth structure, which can lead to decay. Saliva not only buffers acids but also contains calcium and phosphorus that can be replaced into the tooth surface and help strengthen it. This process is called remineralisation, and it helps maintain tooth structure and

prevent holes forming.

What does chewing gum not do?

Gum does not remove plaque the way a toothbrush and floss do. It will not treat decay, gum disease or a dry mouth that has a medical cause. If chewing causes jaw pain or clicking, or if you have jaw problems, speak to your dentist before using gum regularly. Chewing gum may also not suit people with some dental work, so ask us if you are unsure.

How can you use gum sensibly?

Choose sugar-free gum.

Chew it for a short time after meals or snacks when you cannot brush.

Keep up twice-daily brushing with fluoride toothpaste and clean between your teeth.

Limit sugary and acidic foods and drinks, and keep to regular dental visits.

Alongside a low-sugar diet, a regular oral hygiene routine and frequent visits to your dentist, good saliva flow supports your oral health.

Planning your care

When you book a visit, tell us about any concerns such as a dry mouth, frequent decay or jaw discomfort, and bring a list of your medicines. Our dentist can examine your teeth and gums, explain what is suitable for you and give you a written plan and quote before treatment starts. Call 000 immediately for uncontrollable bleeding, difficulty breathing or swallowing, or serious facial injury.

Gum works against acid as well as sugar

Chewing gum is usually discussed as a decay measure. The same mechanism works against a second and separate problem, and the published advice names gum in both places.

Decay and erosion are not the same process. Decay, in the Victorian Department of Health's description, is driven by bacteria: they "use the sugars in the food and drinks you consume to create the energy they need to live", and "when turning the sugar to energy, the bacteria in your mouth create acid as a waste product". Erosion skips the bacteria entirely — it is "the loss of the surface of your teeth due to acids you eat or drink, or acids coming up from your stomach".

Saliva is the defence in both cases, which is why gum appears in both sets of advice.

On decay, the Department lists "chewing sugar-free chewing gum after meals to increase saliva flow - saliva is very important for protecting your teeth from decay".

On erosion, almost the same sentence with the other noun: "Use sugar-free chewing gum after meals to promote saliva flow. Saliva is very important for protecting your teeth from erosion."

So the useful timing is after, not instead. Both statements place gum after meals, where it shortens the acid episode you have just created. Neither presents it as something to chew in place of cleaning.

The limit on the erosion side is worth stating. Saliva "can wash acids out of your mouth into the stomach, it can neutralise acid, and it can repair the early stages of erosion. However, it cannot grow back the lost tooth surface." More saliva does not restore a surface that has already gone — it protects what is left.

And the one thing to avoid after stomach acid. Where the acid came up rather than went in, the Department's advice is to neutralise first and not reach for a brush: wait "at least 30 minutes after the

acid exposure before brushing your teeth". Gum, water, or dairy are the things to use in that window.

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Tooth decay, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 28 June 2025); Dental erosion, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 22 October 2025). Both accessed 6 November 2026.

Where gum sits among the things that actually work

Gum is a small, easy measure, and the honest way to present it is next to the measures it does not replace. The Department's own prevention list puts it in company, and reading the whole list is the best argument for keeping gum in proportion.

Its list of what prevents tooth decay includes:

"eating a healthy well balanced diet"

"reduce how often you eat sugary foods or have sugary drinks"

"avoid sugary snacks between meals. If you're going to have something sweet, try to have it at mealtimes"

"drink tap water (containing fluoride) rather than soft drinks or juice"

"be conscious of hidden sugars in snacks, cereals and other packaged products"

"brushing your teeth twice a day and flossing once a day"

"using toothpaste that contains fluoride"

"chewing sugar-free chewing gum after meals to increase saliva flow"

"staying well hydrated as this improves your saliva"

"having the deep grooves on some of your teeth sealed with dental material called a fissure sealant, if recommended by your dentist"

Gum is one line of ten, and the lines above it are the ones doing most of the work.

What gum definitely does not do. It does not clean between teeth, and the Department is specific about the size of that gap: "brushing alone will not remove all the bacteria, sugar and acid that have built up between your teeth. If you forget to floss or use an interdental brush (for bigger gaps between teeth), up to a third of each tooth doesn't get cleaned!" If brushing misses that much, gum certainly does.

On hydration, which gum is sometimes used as a substitute for. The Department's advice is fluid rather than chewing: "staying well hydrated as this improves your saliva - remember that dehydration can reduce the amount of saliva you make so drink 6-8 glasses of fluids per day, mostly tap water". It also names caffeine as working against you — "high intake of caffeine found in coffee, tea, chocolate and cola drinks can reduce fluid levels in the body and also reduce saliva".

If your mouth is dry most of the time, gum is not the answer. The Department treats persistent dry mouth as something to investigate rather than manage: "If you have a constant dry mouth, consult your dentist or doctor to find the cause." The causes it lists include medications that "affect your salivary glands", dehydration, conditions such as Sjogren's disease, and medical treatments where "radiotherapy, chemotherapy or surgery to the head and neck can permanently reduce saliva flow". Permanently is the word that rules out a chewing-gum solution.

Why saliva is worth encouraging at all. Because of what it does when there is enough of it: "It washes sugar out of your mouth and into your stomach, stops acid from causing damage, fights bacteria and can repair the early stages of tooth decay by repairing tooth mineral." And the balance the Department describes is the whole argument for small measures: "If the amount of acid from the bacteria on your teeth outweighs the protective effect of your saliva, then tooth decay will occur."

Gum tips that balance slightly, several times a day. That is a real benefit and a modest one, and it is the fair way to describe it.

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Tooth decay, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 28 June 2025); Teeth and mouth care, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 25 July 2025). Both accessed 6 November 2026.

Frequently asked questions

Is all chewing gum good for your teeth?

No. Only sugar-free gum is helpful. Gum containing sugar provides food for the bacteria that cause decay. Check the label and, if in doubt, ask your dentist which products suit you.

Can chewing gum replace brushing my teeth?

No. Gum increases saliva flow, but it does not clean plaque from your teeth as brushing and cleaning between your teeth do. Use it as a supplement to, not a substitute for, your daily routine.

Does chewing gum help with a dry mouth?

Chewing stimulates saliva flow, which may help some people with a dry mouth. A persistent dry mouth can have medical causes, so please see your dentist or doctor to find out why.

When should I chew sugar-free gum?

Chewing sugar-free gum after a meal or snack, when you cannot brush, is a sensible option. Saliva helps wash away food and acids and neutralise the acid that follows eating.

Does chewing gum help with acid erosion as well as decay?

Yes, and the Victorian Department of Health gives it its own line in the erosion advice: "Use sugar-free chewing gum after meals to promote saliva flow. Saliva is very important for protecting your teeth from erosion." Erosion is a separate process from decay — it is "the loss of the surface of your teeth due to acids you eat or drink, or acids coming up from your stomach" — but saliva protects against both.

Can more saliva repair enamel that has already worn away?

No. Saliva "can repair the early stages of erosion. However, it cannot grow back the lost tooth surface." It protects what is still there.

When is the best time to chew sugar-free gum?

After meals. The Department places it there in both sets of advice: "chewing sugar-free chewing gum after meals to increase saliva flow" for decay, and "use sugar-free chewing gum after meals to promote saliva flow" for erosion.

Can gum replace flossing?

No. "Brushing alone will not remove all the bacteria, sugar and acid that have built up between your teeth", and without floss or an interdental brush "up to a third of each tooth doesn't get cleaned". If brushing misses that much between teeth, chewing does not reach it at all.

Where does gum rank among the things that prevent decay?

It is one item on a ten-point list that starts with diet and brushing. The Department's list includes eating a balanced diet, reducing how often you have sugary food and drink, keeping sweets to mealtimes, choosing tap water, watching hidden sugars, brushing twice a day and flossing once a day, fluoride toothpaste, sugar-free gum after meals, staying hydrated, and fissure sealants where a dentist recommends them.

Is gum a good way to deal with a dry mouth?

Not as a solution. The Department's advice for a persistent dry mouth is to "consult your dentist or doctor to find the cause", and the causes it lists include some medications, dehydration, conditions such as Sjogren's disease, and head or neck radiotherapy, chemotherapy or surgery, which "can permanently reduce saliva flow".

How much should I drink to help saliva?

The Department's figure is "6-8 glasses of fluids per day, mostly tap water". It also notes that "high intake of caffeine found in coffee, tea, chocolate and cola drinks can reduce fluid levels in the body and also reduce saliva".

What does saliva actually do?

"It washes sugar out of your mouth and into your stomach, stops acid from causing damage, fights bacteria and can repair the early stages of tooth decay by repairing tooth mineral." Decay happens, the Department says, when "the amount of acid from the bacteria on your teeth outweighs the protective effect of your saliva".

Should I chew gum instead of brushing if I cannot get to a basin?

Water is the Department's stated fallback in that situation: drink "some tap water to wash sugars out of your mouth if you have sugary food or drinks but can't brush your teeth soon after". Gum after the meal is a reasonable addition, not a substitute for the clean later.

Related services and further reading

Brushing your teeth the right way

Why clean between your teeth?

Mouth ulcers: what could be the cause?

Acid attack: the effects of acidic drinks on tooth enamel

Snacks that help prevent tooth decay

Dental check-ups

Dental hygiene

Sources

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Oral and Dental Expert Group (2007). Therapeutic guidelines: oral and dental. North Melbourne: Therapeutic Guidelines Limited.

How can we help?

If you have questions about your saliva, decay risk or daily routine, our team can help at any Core Dental clinic, including Caroline Springs , Epping and Glenferrie . Book a check-up and we will tailor advice to you.

Core Dental at a glance

Nine Core Dental clinics across Melbourne: Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside and Glenferrie.

Open six days a week: Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

We quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans, with HICAPS on-site claiming.

Call 13 13 16 or book online at coredental.com.au.

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
Booking	Online via coredental.com.au
Hours	Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday mornings, Sunday closed
Clinics	Southbank , South Melbourne , Caroline Springs , Carrum Downs , Epping , Wyndham , Berwick , Bayside , Glenferrie

Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. This information is general in nature and is intended for people over 18. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before proceeding.

Does sugar-free chewing gum clean your mouth?

Sugar-free gum can support oral health because chewing increases saliva flow, which washes away sugars, acids and bacteria. At Core Dental we explain that it supplements, and does not replace, brushing and cleaning between your teeth.

How much does chewing gum increase saliva flow?

Chewing stimulates the salivary glands, and stimulated saliva can flow at about 10 to 12 times the rate of saliva at rest. This extra flow helps wash sugars, acids and bacteria out of the mouth.

Which substances in saliva fight bacteria?

Saliva contains antimicrobial substances including lysozyme, peroxidase and lactoferrin, which injure bacteria and prevent their growth. Core Dental dentists explain how saliva supports oral health at your check-up.

How does saliva protect teeth from acid?

Saliva contains bicarbonate and buffering proteins such as sialin that neutralise acids from bacteria and from drinks like soft drink, citrus and wine. A faster flow also dilutes the acid, helping prevent loss of tooth structure.

What is remineralisation of teeth?

Remineralisation is the process in which calcium and phosphorus from saliva are replaced into the tooth surface, helping strengthen tooth structure and prevent holes forming. Core Dental recommends fluoride toothpaste and regular check-ups to support it.

Does chewing gum help with dentures or speech?

Increased saliva flow improves the fit of dentures and makes speech, chewing and swallowing easier. Core Dental dentists can advise on denture care if you have ongoing comfort concerns.

How do I book a dental check-up at Core Dental?

Call 13 13 16 or book online at coredental.com.au. We have nine clinics across Melbourne, open Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings, and we quote before treatment starts.