

## Gum for Health

Want some dessert, but you're trying to lose weight?

Want to get lots of vitamins, but don't like eating fruits and vegetables?

Want whiter teeth?

Try chewing some gum.



Many companies make gum. They want new ways to get people to buy more gum. Adding healthy benefits to gum gets people's attention. Then they are more likely to buy the product.

How much gum people buy doesn't change much. Some people don't like chewing gum. So they don't buy any. The people who do chew gum can only chew so much gum in a day.

"The way to sell more gum is to come up with something new," said David Johnston. Mr. Johnston works for a company that makes gum. "Research goes into each new product. The flavor and other things about the gum are planned for certain groups of people. For

example, younger people tend to like sour flavor. Older people tend to like flavors like cinnamon or mint."

Even the color of the gum is chosen because of how it will get people's attention.

For many people, the flavor is the most important reason for choosing a gum. Companies are often creating new flavors.

"Tropical flavors are big right now," said Mr. Johnston. "Especially with younger gum chewers."

Another trend is flavor blends, such as citrus with strawberry or berry with green apple.

To make the flavors more exciting, Kraft Foods created a gum called Stride Shift. This gum changes flavor as you chew it. It starts out with a fruit flavor. Then it shifts to mint.

Another gum company has created a line of flavors that taste like your favorite sweet treat. Wrigley's Extra Dessert Delight comes in flavors like Key Lime Pie, Strawberry Shortcake and Chocolate Chip Mint. This gum is for people who are on a diet. The gum is a way to get the sweet flavor of a dessert without the calories of the real thing.

"Gum can be great for helping lose weight," said Jane Mason. Jane is a mother of two. She loves to chew gum. "I chew a piece of sugar-free gum every night after dinner. I like chewing it while I'm watching TV. It tells my brain that I'm done eating for the day. But I don't feel like I'm missing out on having a snack."

Other gum companies are focusing on health benefits to make their gum special. Several companies sell gum to whiten teeth. Trident's

Vitality is one of the newest gums for sale. It contains vitamin C.

Some people think that gum chewing can also help memory. But the benefit comes from the act of chewing the gum, not from ingredients in the gum. This means that any gum might work.

“Memory and scent are connected in our minds,” explained Mr. Johnston. You might try chewing gum while you study for a test. Then chew that same flavor while you take the test. You may better remember what you studied.

“Our green apple flavor seems to work well,” says Mr. Johnston. “But we don’t say that on the label. There hasn’t been enough research done to prove how well it works. There are many people, however, who say it works for them.”

Gum may also help with memory by increasing oxygen to the brain. The physical act of chewing seems to bring more oxygen into the nose and mouth. This benefits the rest of the body.

The oxygen may help some people feel more awake. “When I’m studying late at night I chew gum,” said Rebecca Brigham. Rebecca is a high school student. “I swear it makes me feel less tired.”

If you really want to stay awake, you can try a gum with caffeine added.

New packages also get people’s attention. “We’ve made our packages of gum bigger,” said David Johnston. “We also changed the shape of the package. We don’t want the gum to fall out in a woman’s purse.”

“We want to create an impulse buy. A person sees our gum at the grocery store check stand.

It gets their attention. They want to buy it right then. That’s what we’re going for.”

So is it really a good idea to chew gum?

As long as the gum is sugar-free. Chewing sugar-free gum after meals can help clean the teeth. It reduces the chance of cavities. Gum fixes bad breath. Chewing the gum can help strengthen teeth.

“My dentist tells me that I should be chewing two pieces of sugar-free gum every day,” said Jane Mason. “I don’t know if every dentist says that. But I’m not going to complain!”