

ICGA RESPONSE TO WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION REVIEWS OF ASPARTAME

Washington D.C., USA, July 13, 2023. 6.30 pm.

Earlier today, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the results of parallel reviews of aspartame by two WHO authoritative bodies -- the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) and the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA). IARC has classified aspartame as 'possibly carcinogenic to humans' (Group 2B) – which is the second lowest hazard classification¹. JECFA has considered IARC's classification and re-affirmed the safety of aspartame at the long established Acceptable Daily Intake (ADI) for this substance of 40 milligrams per kilogram of body weight per day. JECFA's conclusions echo those reached previously by many international and national food safety risk assessment authorities over the past 40 years.

Aspartame Remains Approved As Safe in Chewing Gum.

The results of JECFA's review mean that aspartame - one of the most thoroughly researched food ingredients in history – is considered by experts to be a safe food additive at currently permitted levels. Low and no calorie sweeteners (LNCS), including aspartame, are among the most thoroughly researched food ingredients. Aspartame itself has undergone stringent food safety risk assessments by globally recognized food safety authorities, including the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and has been approved for use in a variety of foods, including chewing gum.

Chewing Gum Sweetened with Aspartame Provides Demonstrated Dental Health Benefits.

Most chewing gum products do not contain sugars like sucrose or glucose syrup. Instead, they are sweetened with LNCS, including aspartame, which are widely recognized for their important oral/dental health benefits. Oral/dental health is a major global challenge: untreated dental caries (tooth decay) affects more than 2.5 billion people, making it the single most common health condition worldwide. Unlike sugar(s) and like other LNCS, aspartame does not promote tooth decay because it cannot be broken down by oral bacteria in the mouth. Furthermore, chewing sugar-free chewing gum stimulates saliva which helps to maintain healthy teeth by clearing the mouth of food debris and sugar(s), neutralizing harmful plaque acids, and supporting remineralization of tooth enamel.

The use of sugar-free chewing gum to promote and support oral health and reduce the risk of dental caries has been recognized by leading governmental authorities.

In the European Union, seven oral health benefit claims specific to sugar-free chewing gum have been approved for more than a decade,^{2,3,4} based on a review of scientific opinions evaluated by EFSA specific to the chewing gum matrix.^{5,6} National health authorities in Canada,⁷ Australia,⁸ and Germany⁹ are among those to have publicly endorsed the oral health benefits of sugar-free chewing gum. Similarly, based on peer-reviewed and published studies – several of which involved sugar-free chewing gum – the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has authorized a health claim associating foods sweetened with “non-cariogenic carbohydrate sweeteners” with the reduction of risk of dental caries.¹⁰ Research shows that people who regularly chew sugar-free chewing gum develop significantly fewer cavities than those who do not.¹¹ Studies have also demonstrated the economic health benefits of chewing sugar-free chewing gum. For example, a 2017 published study found that if everyone chewed just one additional piece of chewing gum per day, it would result in USD 4.1 billion savings in dental care costs worldwide annually due to caries prevention.¹² Other market-specific studies have reached similar conclusions.^{13,14}

In today's busy world, people tend to snack throughout the day, often on-the-go. This creates more eating occasions where plaque can form, leaving teeth exposed to decay. Chewing sugar-free chewing gum after meals and snacks is a convenient and cost-effective way to promote oral health, especially when on-the-go or eating at irregular times which may preclude regular brushing. Chewing sugar-free chewing gum is not a replacement for other oral health interventions like tooth brushing. However, it should form part of an overall oral hygiene routine, including twice-daily brushing with appropriate toothpaste, a healthy balanced diet, and regular check-ups with a dental professional, and be consumed after each eating (or drinking) occasion.

About chewing gum.

Chewing gum is a unique food product enjoyed by millions of people around the world. Humans have embraced the pleasure of chewing for thousands of years, drawn by the sensation of freshening the breath and the mouth. Today, chewing gum plays an important role in wellbeing and self-care: people chew to relax, to feel confident, to focus, or simply to experience a moment of distraction during the day. And for decades, mounting evidence has shown that sugar-free chewing gum supports oral health by reducing risk factors associated with tooth decay.

Media Resources

For media inquiry about aspartame:

- media@sweeteners.org or info@caloriecontrol.org or by phone at +1-833-318-2430
- [ISA press release on WHO review of aspartame](#)

For media inquiry about chewing gum:

- icga@gumassociation.org or by phone at +32 2 645 50 60
- [ICGA press release on WHO review of aspartame](#)

Further Resources

- International Sweeteners Association, [Low Calorie Sweeteners Role and Benefits Guide](#)
- Wrigley Oral Healthcare Program, [Sugar-free Chewing Gum in Oral Health: A Clinical Overview](#)
- Calorie Control Council, <https://caloriecontrol.org/>
- International Stevia Council, <https://internationalsteviacouncil.org/science-of-stevia/safety/>

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- ¹ IARC has assigned aspartame to the same group of carcinogenicity hazard as several commonly consumed foods, pointing out that there was limited evidence for cancer in humans and less-than-sufficient evidence for cancer in experimental animals (so-called “Group 2B” titled “Possible carcinogenic for humans”).
 - ² Commission Regulation (EC) No 1024/2009 of 29 October 2009, see [here](#).
 - ³ Commission Regulation (EU) 665/2011 of 11 July 2011, see [here](#).
 - ⁴ Commission Regulation (EU) 432/2012 of 16 May 2012, see consolidated version [here](#).
 - ⁵ EFSA Journal **2009**; 7(9):1271 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2903/j.efsa.2009.1271>
 - ⁶ EFSA Journal (**2008**) 852, 1-15. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2903/j.efsa.2008.852>
 - ⁷ Health Canada. Summary of Health Canada’s assessment of a health claim about sugar-free chewing gum and dental caries risk reduction. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/food-labelling/health-claims/assessments/sugar-free-chewing-dental-caries-risk-reduction-nutrition-health-claims-food-labelling.html>
 - ⁸ Healthy Mouths Healthy Lives: Australia’s National Oral Health Plan 2015-2024. Available at: http://iaha.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Australias-National-Oral-Health-Plan-2015-2024_uploaded-170216.pdf
 - ⁹ Association of the Scientific Medical Societies in Germany. Caries prevention in permanent teeth – basic recommendations. Available at: https://register.awmf.org/assets/guidelines/083_D_Ges_fuer_Zahn-_Mund-_und_Kieferheilkunde/083-021le_S2k_Caries_prevention_2017-03.pdf
 - ¹⁰ 61 Fed. Reg. 43433, et seq. (August 23, 1996). See <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/FR-1996-08-23/96-21481/context>.
 - ¹¹ Newton JT et al. A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of the Role of Sugar-Free Chewing Gum in Dental Caries. JDR Clin Trans Res. 2020 Jul;5(3):214-223. DOI: 10.1177/2380084419887178.
 - ¹² Rychlik R et al. A global approach to assess the economic benefits of increased consumption of sugar-free chewing gum. Am J Dent. 2017 Apr;30(2):77-83. See <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29178768/>
 - ¹³ Claxton L, Taylor M, Kay E. Oral health promotion: the economic benefits to the NHS of increased use of sugarfree gum in the UK. British Dental Journal. 2016; 220(3): 121. See <https://doi.org/10.1038/sj.bdj.2016.94>
 - ¹⁴ Zimmer S., Spyra A, Kreimendahl F. Elevating the use of sugar-free chewing gum in Germany: cost saving and caries prevention. Acta Odontologica Scandinavica. 2018. 76:6, 407-414. See <https://doi.org/10.1080/00016357.2018.1487994>