

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.



Companies that make gum are trying all sorts of new ways to get people to buy more gum. Combining gum with healthy benefits gets people's attention. Then they are more likely to buy the product.

The amount of gum that 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 only way to sell more gum is to come up with something new," said David Johnston. Mr. Johnston is the Marketing Director for a major gum manufacturer. "A great deal of research goes into each new product. We plan the flavor

and other aspects of the gum so that they appeal to certain groups of people. For example, sour flavors tend to appeal to younger people. Older people often prefer more traditional flavors like cinnamon or mint."

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

For many people, the flavor is the most important reason for choosing one gum over another. Companies are often releasing new flavors.

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

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

To take the flavor experience one step further, Kraft Foods created a gum called Stride Shift. This gum changes flavor as you chew it. It starts out with a fruit flavor and 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 marketed to people who are on a diet. The gum is a way to get the sweet, yummy 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 who 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 with my family. 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 stand out. Several companies sell gum to whiten teeth. Trident's Vitality is one of the newest gums for sale. It contains vitamin C.

There is some evidence that gum chewing can also help memory. But it appears as though the benefit comes from the act of chewing the gum, not from ingredients in the gum. This means that any gum might work.

"Memory is closely tied to scent in our minds," explained Mr. Johnston. According to the research, you should chew a certain flavor of gum while you study for a test. Then chew that same flavor while you take the test. You'll be better able to remember what you studied.

"Our green apple flavor seems to work particularly well," says Mr. Johnston. "But we don't say that on the label. There hasn't been enough research done to prove how much of a difference it makes. There are many people, however, who claim it works for them."

Gum may also help with memory by increasing oxygen flow to the brain. The physical act of chewing seems to bring more oxygen into the nose and mouth, which, in turn, 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 high school student Rebecca Brigham. "I swear it makes me feel less tired."

Of course, if you are really concerned about staying awake, you can try one of the several gums with caffeine as an added ingredient.

If the flavors and added benefits don't get your attention, maybe the packaging will. "We've made our packages of gum bigger," said David

Johnston. "We also changed the shape of the package so the gum won't fall out in a woman's purse."

"We want to create something that generates impulse buys. A person sees our gum at the grocery store check stand. It gets their attention, and they want to buy it. 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 is well known as a way to fix bad breath. And the action of chewing the gum can help strengthen teeth.

"My dentist tells me every visit 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!"