



# Benefits Spotlight

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## Sugar Substitutes: Tooth-friendly Fad or Just as Bad?

With summer just around the corner—and your next dentist appointment not more than 6 months away—you may be thinking of ways to shave some sugar from your diet.

Sugar substitutes have been around for decades, but there’s still little clarity on their safety and health benefits. One thing for certain is that loads of sugar and good dental health don’t mix. So, where do you turn if you want control your weight and improve your dental health by reducing your sugar intake, but aren’t sure if sugar substitutes are the way to do it?

Many sugar substitutes are available today, so one way to cut the confusion is to focus on learning about one or two to help determine if they’re right for you. Here, you’ll explore two popular sugar substitutes—stevia and xylitol—with this side-by-side comparison.

	<b>Stevia</b>	<b>Xylitol</b>
<b>Where is it derived from?</b>	The stevia plant	Naturally occurring; found in a variety of fruits, vegetables and grains
<b>Caloric and sweetness comparison to sugar</b>	Contains no calories, yet is 100 to 300 times sweeter than sugar	Contains 40% fewer calories with a similar sweetness level to sugar
<b>Dental benefits</b>	Not linked to tooth decay	Not linked to tooth decay; may prevent cavities when used in chewing gum or oral care products
<b>FDA approved?</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>Important side effects</b>	May cause bloating or nausea	May cause diarrhea and gas when consumed in excess

While stevia and xylitol have their benefits and drawbacks, both are generally safe to use and may help improve your oral health. The choice ultimately depends on your taste preferences (sugar substitutes have different sweetness levels and aftertastes).

**The bottom line?** Sugar substitutes like xylitol and stevia can help you safely reduce the amount of sugar in your diet, which will promote your oral and overall health. However, these are not miracle products. Sugar or substitute, your teeth need a twice-daily regimen of brushing and flossing to stay healthy.

## Sources

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## How Therapy Dogs Wag Away Anxiety from Dental Visits

Dental anxiety keeps as many as 15 percent of Americans from visiting their dentist for routine preventive care—and that’s a big problem, because those biannual appointments are key to keeping small issues from being major oral health problems.

Fortunately, dentists are using an array of techniques to help patients feel calmer, including virtual reality headsets that transport patients to a soothing location, aromatherapy and spa treatments (like paraffin hand wax and warming neck wraps, to name a few). Another innovation gaining traction is the use of therapy dogs in dental offices.

A furry friend by your side can be a potent distraction during your dental appointment, but dentists can’t let just any dog into their office to offer support. Therapy dogs are specially trained and certified animals that can safely be around both kids and adults. These animals can also withstand the strong smells and sounds in the dental environment.



While dentists who use therapy dogs in their offices make every effort to ensure their animals do not upset patients with allergies, no dog breed is 100 percent hypoallergenic. If your dentist uses a therapy dog, he or she will make you well aware before bringing the dog into the exam room. Don’t hesitate to let your dentist know if you have an allergy or simply prefer to pass on the company of a calming canine.

Dental anxiety is a very real phobia, but your dentist has many ways to make your visit more comfortable—and a therapy dog might be the sweetest. Talk to your dentist about how he or she can ease your fears during your next visit.

## Sources

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