Most sugar-free chewing gums in Middle East lack clear labelling on xylitol

By DTI

KUWAIT CITY, KUWAIT: The majority of sugar-free chewing gums containing xylitol are sold in the Coopera-tion Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) countries do not have clear labelling regarding xylitol content, a new study has found.

According to the researchers, the product labels mention neither the recommended daily dose of xylitol for caries prevention nor the actual amount of xylitol the chewing gum contains. They also found that the majority of gums do not provide the necessary amount of xylitol for caries prevention.

The aim of the study, conducted by Dr Abrar al-Anzi, assistant professor at the Department of Developmental and Preventive Sciences of the Faculty of Dentistry at Kuwait University and her colleagues, was to identify sugar-free chewing gums available in the GCC region that provide the recommended daily dose of xylitol for the prevention of dental caries.

The daily dose recommended by various dental associations around the world ranges between 3 and 10 g of xylitol, available in the form of gums or lozenges, three to seven times a day. Taken regularly, xylitol can contribute to the prevention of caries by inhibiting the growth of Streptococcus mutans, one of the main bacteria associated with tooth decay. Moreover, the sugar substitute has been found to enhance remineralisation and reduce the quantity of dental plaque, as most plaque bacteria are not able to ferment xylitol into cariogenic end-products.

The researchers examined the concentration of xylitol in 21 brands of chewing gum (from Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Oman), using a special enzymatic kit. They found a xylitol content of less than 0.1 g per piece of gum in nine products, of 0.3-0.5 g in seven and of more than 0.5 g in five products. According to the scientists, the majority of gums analysed did not provide the necessary amount of xylitol for caries prevention.

Moreover, most of the products tested lacked accurate labelling regarding their xylitol content. Of the 21 brands, only one clearly mentioned the amount of xylitol in grams on its label. Twelve products stated the percentage of xylitol (1.5-35 per cent) but did not specify the amount.

"Looking at the percentage, it is not easy for the consumer to calculate the actual amount of xylitol in grams. A consumer should be informed of the contents and the amount used in the product so that he can make an informed decision," al-Anzi told the Middle Eastern newspaper Muscat Daily.

The researchers have therefore recommended clear, accurate labelling of all xylitol-containing gums sold in the GCC countries and advised dental associations in the Middle Eastern region to adopt the general recommendations for labelling of current xylitol products.

The study, titled "Xylitol chewing gums on the market: Do they prevent caries?", was published online in the Oral Health and Preventive Dentistry journal on 12 May.

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