

Chewing Gum is Full of Plastic and Wax

Human beings like to chew on things. Multiple ancient societies had chewing gum in some form, from the Mayans with chicle to the Ancient Greeks with Mastic resin. The modern candy aisle has significant shelf space dedicated to chewing gum. However, the sweet and minty treats familiar to people today bear little resemblance to the gum of old, and ingredients in this modern chewing gum should give you pause.

Conventional gums have sweeteners like corn syrup, sugar alcohols (such as xylitol), aspartame, and other ingredients like glycerine (to maintain moistness) and natural and/or artificial flavorings. Many of these ingredients have been shown to have negative effects on human health.

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Most of these ingredients are problematic, but at least they are clearly listed on labels, unlike gum base which is listed as a single ingredient even though the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) categorizes 46 different chemicals as gum base. Gum base provides the structure for the gum and makes up the largest percentage of the gum, although the actual amount of gum base varies based on what kind of gum it is. Bubble gum consists of 15–20% gum base. Chewing gum consists of 20–25% gum base, and sugar-free chewing gum contains 25–30% gum base.

What it is in the gum base specifically is considered a trade secret, but typical ingredients include;

- natural coagulated or concentrated latices of vegetable origin (resins like chicle, beeswax, and natural rubbers like latex)
- synthetic coagulated or concentrated latices (paraffins;

petroleum wax; and polymers like butadiene-styrene, vinyl acetate, and polyethylene)

- softeners and plasticizers (lecithins; hydrogenated vegetable oils; lanolin, glycerol, methyl, and pentaerythritol esters; sodium and potassium stearates)
- terpene resins
- antioxidants (usually BHT)

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Gum base also includes fillers like calcium carbonate or talc. Another chewing gum ingredient to watch out for is polyvinyl acetate, a plastic substance which causes tumors in rats, according to the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).

Many consider chewing gum a harmless pastime but imagine the harmful effects of each of these ingredients. Now add them all together...not pleasant. Yet another reason to never swallow your gum.