

PATHWAYS TO TOOTHFRIENDLY CONFECTIONERY

DENTAL HEALTH SERVICES VICTORIA

The role of sugars as a cause of dental caries (decay) has been well established (Murray, 1996; Thylstrup and Fejerskov, 1994). The replacement of such sugars with sugar substitutes has also been widely researched. Evidence based research has shown that foods, beverages and confectionery manufactured with sugar substitutes can reduce the caries producing potential of foods and drinks (Hamada, Ooshima, Fujiwara, Minami, Kimura, 1996).

With this evidence base in mind this project set out to investigate the feasibility of introducing nutrient messages and possibly the Toothfriendly Logo® on sugar-free confectionery in Australia.

The project was one of 16 oral health promotion projects funded by the Department of Human Services. It comprised two main phases – firstly, a literature search and critical appraisal of sugar-substitutes and their regulations in Australia, secondly, there was a series of structured interviews with key stakeholders and the manufacturers and distributors of sugar-free confectionery.

A reference group was established to sift through information they collected and to develop a framework for consideration of nutrient messages and perhaps the use of the Toothfriendly Logo® on sugar-free confectionery products available in Australia. The two main goals of the project were:

1. To develop the process required to apply for and use messages and logos on sugar-free products: and
2. To investigate the viability and sustainability of such messages and logos in the Australian confectionery market.

The Australian and New Zealand Food Authority (ANZFA) recently reviewed Health and Related Claims and made recommendations for claims about tooth decay. They concluded that claims such as “does not promote tooth decay” would not be considered health claims and would therefore be acceptable on packages of appropriate products (ANZFA, August 2000).

The Toothfriendly Logo® is the certification mark for Toothfriendly Sweets International (TSI) based on a test of acid production and erosive potential of a confection. TSI a non-profit association based in Switzerland. The use of the Toothfriendly Logo® on sugar-free confectionery has been well received in Europe; however, it has not had much success in Australia with only two local manufacturers using it. Structured interviews conducted with four leading Australian manufacturers found cost, both for themselves and consumers, along with adverse side effects due to certain ingredients and the lack of awareness in general were some of the reasons why they were not using the logo.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. Any strategy related to the promotion of sugar free confectionery must be considered within the context of an overall health, nutritional and oral health promotion policy.
2. The current ANZFA recommendation that the wording on packets containing sugar free confectionery or chewing gums, that the product “does not promote

tooth decay” is evidence-based and appropriate in the context of the Australian community.

3. Use of the words “does not promote tooth decay” and of a specific logo on a product packet, indicating that a product is sugar free, provide easily identifiable means for the consumer to recognise sugar free products.
4. The testing processes of TSI to determine the potential acid production and erosion potential of sugar free products are in accord with currently acceptable methods.
5. The TSI Toothfriendly Logo® be recognised as the international symbol for indicating a TSI tested confection is “sugar free” and “does not promote tooth decay”.
6. State health departments and professional organisations develop, as part of their raft of materials on oral health, simple, accurate and non-contradictory information on the availability of “sugar free” chewing gums and confectionery and on the TSI Toothfriendly Logo®.
7. Dental Health Services Victoria develop a communication strategy within its Strategic Plan to advise health and consumer organisations, dental professionals including the Australian Dental Association (ADA), Australian Dental Therapists’ Association (ADTA), Australian Dental Hygienist Association (ADHA), the National Oral Health Advisory committee and allied health workers on the availability, benefits and limits of sugar free products and the TSI Toothfriendly Logo®.
8. Through the National Public Health Partnership Group, the federal government be asked to consider exempting sugar free confectionery and chewing gums from GST.
9. Further economic evaluation be conducted on the cost-benefits of sugar-free confectionery.