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New gum has taste for fight against bad teeth

STEFANIE ESCHENBACHER

August 21, 2006

A CHEWING gum that prevents tooth decay may be in the shops as early as next year. The gum, developed by the German chemical company BASF, contains a "friendly" lactobacillus bacteria that fights the bugs which rot teeth.

BASF is also understood to be working on other bacteria products, including toothpaste, mouthwashes and deodorant.

The company is keeping its detailed plans a secret and will only confirm that "a lactobacillus product" is due to be launched in 2007.

However, it is likely to be the chewing gum, which is at an advanced stage of development.

The gum contains a new strain of lactobacillus, a microbe found naturally in yoghurt and buttermilk.

Screening identified a variant of the organism that binds to streptococcus mutans, the bacterium which causes tooth decay.

Streptococcus mutans stick to the surface of teeth and produce a powerful acid that breaks down the enamel.

The new lactobacillus strain, which has been named lactobacillus anti-caries, causes streptococcus mutans bugs to clump together so they cannot fix on to teeth and are easily rinsed out of the mouth.

"Tests reveal that the chewing gum can reduce the amount of bacteria in the mouth by 50 times," Chemistry & Industry magazine reported.

The gum has been developed in collaboration with the German company **OrganoBalance**, which was set up to exploit "friendly" bacteria technology.

Stefan Marcinowski, BASF executive director of research, told Chemistry & Industry the product had been tried out on "large numbers of people and demonstrated the ability to significantly reduce bacterial levels".

He added: "This bacterium is well established and safe."

Two other Lactobacillus strains, *L. pes-odoris* and *L. ala-odoris*, have been found to inhibit body odour bacteria in the feet and armpits.

BASF hopes to produce a deodorant based on the second strain to prevent smelly armpits.

Tests suggest that a prototype product containing *L. ala-odoris* can fight odour for up to eight hours. But BASF says the product needs to be made more efficient before it can be marketed.

Dr Peter Carrotte, of the Dental School of the University of Glasgow, said: "Anything that prevents tooth decay is a good idea."

He said modern dental care aimed at keeping people's teeth healthy rather than treating bad teeth.

"Oral hygiene is essential and a chewing gum is not a replacement for brushing teeth," he said.

Dr Carrotte recommended brushing teeth after meals and before going to bed.

"Some people need to go to the dentist more often than others but everyone should have an annual check, not only for tooth decay but also for mouth cancer and other diseases."

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