Swallowing gum

Alice,

Is it OK to swallow chewing gums? My friend does so, and I'm worried about his stomach.

? Concerned

Answer

Dear Concerned,

While there are many urban legends about the detrimental effects of swallowing gum, your friend's situation is probably not as sticky. Ingested chewing gum will not wrap itself around your vital organs or remain in your stomach for years on end. Although gum is certainly not meant to be swallowed, the body usually eliminates it in the same amount of time it takes to expel other waste.

Occasionally, if several pieces of gum are swallowed within a short period of time, hard masses of indigestible material known as bezoars, may form in the chewer's intestine or stomach. Some people are more predisposed to developing bezoars than others. If your friend is experiencing stomachaches, he may want to meet with a health care provider who can determine if there is indeed a mass lodged in his insides, and if necessary, how it can be removed.

You may also want to ask your friend why he keeps swallowing gum. Perhaps he does it when he's actually hungry and wants something in his stomach, or maybe he does it when he can't find a place to throw his gum away. Maybe when you're with him, you can offer him some scrap paper for him to spit his gum into or tell him to carry around snacks that can temporarily curb his hunger.

Here's to healthy and "Carefree" gum chewing!

Alice!

Category:
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