

# Chewing Gum May Be Handy for C-Section Patients

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Could the simple act of chewing gum after a c-section or other abdominal surgery quicken the return of gastrointestinal function? Evidence supporting chomping down to prevent ileus is slim but not entirely unfounded, according to the Cochrane Colorectal Cancer Group.

## Key Points:

- Chewing gum could help improve the recovery of GI function after abdominal surgery, including c-section.
- Although current scientific evidence related to the practice is limited and weak, a post-op chew likely does no harm.

The reviewers searched through 81 studies and found some evidence that chewing gum after surgery may help the digestive system to recover after anesthesia. They listed several caveats to that conclusion, however.

First, most of the studies were deemed of poor quality, meaning the results weren't reliable. Even the studies they did find ran the gamut of various surgical procedures, meaning it's impossible to extrapolate that handing a stick of gum to a woman who just gave birth via c-section would correlate to a study that showed a benefit among colorectal surgery patients.

That said, the meta-analysis found some evidence that people who chewed gum after an operation were able to pass gas and have bowel movements sooner than people who did not chew gum. Gurgling sounds were also more likely to be heard through a stethoscope when the patient had enjoyed a post-op stick of gum.

There was statistical evidence that chewing gum reduced time to first flatus in colorectal surgery patients by nearly 8 hours and in c-section patients by more than 10.5 hours. Statistical evidence also showed that chewing gum was associated with reductions in the time to bowel movement in both colorectal and c-section patients.

While the hope of a low-cost solution to avoid the all-too-common problem of ileus is worthy of attention, the editorial group concluded that more research is needed. Specifically, they called for larger, randomized, high-quality studies that focus on various types of surgery.

In the meantime, it wouldn't hurt to have chewing gum available on L&D or surgical recovery floors. Perhaps better, tell your patients to pack their favorite flavor.

