



(l-r) Kayla Reynolds, Kim Elgin and Carolin Connelly

## Chewing Gum Can Reduce Complications Among Abdominal Surgery Patients

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Chew on this: chewing gum isn't just for teenagers anymore. **Carolin Connelly**, a registered nurse on 5 West, recently performed a literature review and found that chewing gum can help reduce postoperative ileus in adult abdominal surgery patients.

Ileus is a blockage of the intestines that is common after abdominal surgery. Food, liquids and gases can become trapped in the digestive tract and often require the placement of a nasogastric tube for relief. These procedures place the patient at risk for medication side effects, uncomfortable tube insertions and prolonged length of stay.

Determined to find a solution and help reduce patient discomfort, Connelly performed a literature review using resources available in the Health Sciences Library. She learned that something as simple as chewing gum can help reduce postoperative ileus by activating the body's digestive hormones.

Connelly advocated for gum-chewing in the postoperative adult hepatobiliary surgical patient population, sharing her findings with unit-based peers and interdisciplinary team members. She emphasized the effectiveness of the low-cost and low-risk intervention, and she drafted a proposal and action plan to implement gum-chewing within the unit.

During her literature review, Connelly noted that other adult surgery patient populations also benefited from chewing gum. She presented her findings to the Professional Nursing Staff Organization (PNSO) Clinical Practice Committee, who supported her evidence-based practice approach and voted in favor of implementing gum-chewing in all adult surgical patient populations. With the backing of the PNSO, Connelly proceeded to share her findings with the Adult Acute Care Quality Committee. The interdisciplinary committee approved the proposal, and packs of gum were made available to the units through Nutrition Services.

Chewing gum is now given to patients on postoperative day one when he or she is assessed by the RN to be alert and oriented with a Care Partner at the bedside. The patient is then instructed to chew gum three times a day for 30-60 minutes.

"Carolin's work is a great example of the positive impact each person can have when we pay close attention, look for new ways to improve the patient experience, make good use of the resources available to us and work together as a team," said **Kim Elgin, MSN, RN**, Clinical Nurse Specialist.

Connelly compiled her findings in a poster presentation that was shared at the 10th Annual Evidence-Based Nursing Symposium on Apr. 8.