



Chewing gum could be answer to debilitating post-op nausea

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A simple stick of chewing gum could be the cure for debilitating post-operative nausea and two New Zealand hospitals are part of an international trial to see if gum is the answer.

About a third of surgical patients, suffer from severe nausea, retching and vomiting following an operation and it seems women have these symptoms more than men. However early trials suggest a simple and cheap stick of peppermint gum chewed for about 10 minutes is more effective than anti-nausea drugs during recovery.

A small “Chewy Trial” was initially run at the Royal Melbourne Hospital and it found that chewing gum could overcome three out of four cases of nausea. Now the trial is being run internationally in more than 30 hospitals including Auckland City and North Shore.

Dr Robyn Billing is the New Zealand lead researcher for the anaesthetist-led larger Chewy Trial which is endorsed and funded by the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA). She says there are a lot of pluses if they can prove the gum is truly effective over a large cohort of patients. “We’re exploring chewing gum as an alternative treatment that is readily available, cheap, and easy to administer and free of side effects unlike pharmaceuticals,” she says.

More than 300 million people have surgery worldwide suggesting tens of millions of patients suffer postoperative nausea and vomiting (PONV) – it is the leading cause of unplanned admission of day surgery patients and contributes significantly to patient discomfort and distress.

Dr Billing says chewing gum to treat this world-wide problem would be especially beneficial in less wealthy countries, like Pacific nations where access to drugs is more limited.