Forget psychology and astrology…now turn to “Chewology” to discover your true personality.

When people reach for something to satisfy their craving to chew, whether it’s a straw, the end of a pen, the stem on a pair of glasses, a fingernail, an eraser, cigarette, cigar, snuff or a piece of gum, they are sending silent signals that reveal insights about their attitude and behavior. Chewing our food intensively gives us warm blooded mammals an efficient way to digest and absorb nutrients from food, but we like to chew other things besides meat and potatoes. Why? Because of my expertise in body language, Wrigley's Spearmint Gum asked me this summer to be their national spokesperson and to help study what we have termed “Chewology” to discover what our chewing habits are all about.

The Mouth

Chewology involves the mouth, that part of the body related most to eating, self comfort, emotions and communication. The mouth is a part of what I call the golden triangle on the face. The golden triangle is the upside down triangle that includes the forehead, eyes, nose and mouth. In social interactions we spend more than 80 percent of our time looking at the golden triangle and the other 20 percent looking at the rest of the person’s body. That means the mouth is in the area that gets the majority of attention when we are in a conversation with someone.

In American culture the face symbolizes the self. The face is also the most reliable indicator of someone’s emotions. In addition research suggests that Nonverbal cues that occur in and around the mouth can be strong indicators of a person’s current level of self-esteem and self-confidence. In nonverbal communication what receives the most attention presents the strongest message. Because the face and mouth get so much attention, when we read chewing cues, it is as if those cues stand out in bold print.
Adaptor Cues

Chewology is interesting because it involves adaptor cues. Adaptors are things we originally do to satisfy bodily needs such as scratching the nose because it itches or adjusting a tie because it is crooked. Adaptors also include bodily movements that show discomfort such as finger tapping and nail biting as well as those that tend to show anxiety or nervousness such as rolling a cigarette back and forth between the fingers or playing with a straw. However, we might start doing some of these cues for other reasons. We might push our hair behind the ears before we speak to someone we are attracted to or—something I do—push up the sleeves of a suit as we start a speech. Because people do not use adaptor cues with the intention of communicating and are often unaware that they are even doing anything, Adaptors are especially rich sources of information of psychological states. Chewing habits give us wonderful cues about a person’s emotions.

Chewing habits

When it comes to satisfying the urge to chew, Americans have a myriad of choices. But most people who have that urge will reach for chewing gum. The study done by Wrigley Spearmint on chewing habits said that given the choice about what will fulfill their chew craving, 75 percent of chewers choose gum versus pens, pencils, straws and fingernails.

Chewing on You

At the age of two or three, a child starts all kinds of oral habits: thumb sucking, lip biting, tongue thrusting, and nail biting. Thumb sucking, the most common habit of infancy is a behavior that allows the child to comfort himself or herself and is not a horrible thing for a little one to do once in a while. However, if they do not stop before their permanent teeth come in; it can lead to other nonverbal habits like tongue-thrusting and speech difficulties and dental problems like protruding teeth. The American Dental Association says that thumb sucking is on the rise in adults under stress.

Other behaviors such as lip and nail biting are called self-beating gestures and are indications of nervousness and anxiety, and if excessive, could indicate abuse or low self-esteem. I have advised members of the Foster parents association to look for some of these cues in children when they first arrive in their home as an indication that the children could have been abused. Any cue that involves biting or hurting oneself is a self-beating cue. Dental research indicates that up to 41 percent of children bite their
nails, a habit that they say, if continued into adulthood can cost $4,000 or more per person in dental bills. Other research done by dentists says that children who are habitual thumb suckers often go from that stage to the nail biting stage to chewing their fingers, knuckles or even their own tongue or inside cheek. Dentists say to chew gum if the behavior is linked to stress.

**Stress**

If you find you take on some of these negative chewing habits as an adult, ask yourself what stresses you are under and what you might do to alleviate them. I notice that when I am under stress or am watching a tense movie, I will chew on my forefinger knuckle. It comforts me and makes me feel better. Why do we chew when under stress? Well, when we are stressed, we tend to tighten our muscles, including those that help us breathe, so we take in less oxygen. When we take in less oxygen we have less glucose. Chewing on anything tricks our glands. The chomping action of our jaws makes our mouths water, and fools our glands in expecting the next meal, and they release a surge of insulin. The increase in heart beat increases oxygen and glucose to our brain. The greater the oxygen the better we feel. Basically, chewing charges us up and makes us feel better under stress.

**Pipes, cigars, cigarettes and eyeglasses and straws**

Freud said it was an oral fixation, that sucking or chewing on a pipe indicated a desire to return to a childlike existence and be comforted by mom. For many years smoking devices such as pipes, cigars and cigarettes gave the chewer a more socially acceptable way to chew than going around with a pacifier in their mouths.

I had a boy friend in high school who had a slight stutter. I dated him again when we were both in graduate school. He had developed a chewology habit to stop the stutter. He had started smoking a pipe and would often hold it and play with it even when he was not smoking it. Because I had known him for so long, I realized that when he would normally have stuttered, he would pause and chew on the end of his pipe. It worked beautifully and made him look thoughtful. Later I discovered research on smoking that found that pipe smokers where perceived as high in credibility and attractiveness as compared to cigarette smokers and cigar smokers. In any case, he was attractive to me.

People who don’t smoke will often find some other object to chew on and relieve anxiety. Research on how we interact with our eyeglasses done by prominent optician Alfred Poll shows that
chewing on the end of the temple tip is common among people who are tense, nervous or under great stress. I like the fact that the number one excuse given by patients to their eye doctors for their temple tips being chewed up is, "The dog did it."

You may have heard jokes about what an ice chewing habit means, but the truth according to DentistryOnline is that habitually chewing on ice can be a symptom of iron deficiency anemia. Iron is essential to the oxygen-carrying function of the blood. Without enough oxygen in your tissue you end up feeling tired and listless. Interesting, that we see the oxygen connection again.

Ever since my first soda fountain coke at the movies when I was a kid I have been a straw chewer. Jan Hargrave, a communication consultant’s research on straws as adaptor cues says that straw chewers "…like nourishment in the way of words or emotions."

Gum

The ancient Egyptians chewed on the gum resin Frankincense, the tree resin mentioned frequently in the bible, in prehistoric times Nomad Somilians are believed to have carried Frankincense at all times to quench their thirst, Columbus discovered Indians chewing mastic, and the Mayan's who chewed chicle as early as 800 AD are considered the first American gum chewers.

Gum chewing continues to be one of the more intriguing and fun ways that people satisfy their urge to chew. Today people we define as chewers, will reach for various things when under stress, tense or depressed, but more than 50 percent will reach for gum when they are happy or content, and 46 percent will reach for a piece when they are bored. So when you are giving a presentation and you notice your boss sitting at the other end of the table chewing gum, be relieved she is not chewing on ice which shows frustration or an eraser that would indicated she wants to erase what's going on. She is probably happy or bored, so smile and make your presentation more lively!

Benefits of Chewing Gum

Professor Andrew Scholey of the University of Northumbra, (Great Britain), a specialist in cognitive research, discovered in March of 2002 that there are benefits of chewing. Participants who chewed gum (rather than nothing or air) performed significantly better in tested working memory. There was a 15% increase in long-term memory and a shorting of the learning curve. If only our grade school teachers had known, they would handed out gum at the first bell every day. How does this work? It’s the increase in heart beat again.
The greater the oxygen to the brain, the faster we learn and the longer our retention. Chewers increased their heartbeats three beats per minute faster; the non chewers did not increase their heartbeats. They did not increase their heartbeats and got no surge of insulin, oxygen or glucose. Their brains were running on fumes. Here’s other news, research from the Speed Learning Institute shows that gum chewers increase their reading speed up to 15% as well.

“Statistics show us that 48 percent of Americans who chew gum choose to chew a piece until the flavor runs out,” says Carla Crnkovich, Wrigley’s Spearmint senior marketing manager. So Wrigley’s improved their Spearmint Gum to have longer lasting flavor.

Americans also revealed other gum chewing insights in Wrigley’s Spearmint Gum survey, including:

- **The Time Is Right.** Americans love to chew gum…anywhere and everywhere. When asked when or where they most often chew gum, 30 percent claim to be social chewers – either enjoying a piece while hanging out with friends or when someone offers them a piece. Twenty-two percent say their favorite place to chew is at work or school. I love that because the most recent research done in Europe shows that chewing gum increases your memory and learning capabilities. If only all those teachers who said put away that gum had known that little fact, they would have been handing out packs with every test. Another 18 percent of chewers chew while driving which makes sense as chewing gum increases your heart rate to that of your heart rate when you’re walking, so it can keep you awake and energized.

- **Why You Chew The Way You Do.** When Americans that chew gum were asked why they chew, nearly half (44 percent) chew gum to banish bad breath! Americans are also sweet seekers – 30 percent chew because they enjoy the flavor and taste or crave something sweet. Fifteen percent chew to combat stress and boredom. So notice when you start chewing on something and watch when other people are chewing and ask what is the motivation.

- **Open And Shut Case.** When asked how they would describe their gum chewing, 39 percent of Americans who chew gum say their style is silent and discrete. Twenty two percent of gum chewers label themselves as slow chewers while 15 percent admit to snapping and cracking their gum. Take the chew IQ to find out what your chewing style says about you.

In conjunction with the introduction of its new longer-lasting flavor, Wrigley’s Spearmint® Gum and I teamed up to create the “Wrigley’s Spearmint Chew IQ” quiz. It’s a very simple fun questionnaire that links chewing habits – why, what and how you chew – and your personality.
Simply take “Wrigley’s Spearmint Chew IQ” quiz to evaluate your chewing habits and determine which of the following profiles best describes you;

- **The Helper** finds getting along with others the key for happiness.
- **The Analyzer** is happiest when he/she gets things right.
- **The Doer** likes to get things done.
- **The Persuader** works to be appreciated for his/her talent and effort.

Spearmint Chew IQ Quiz at [www.wrigley.com](http://www.wrigley.com) or go to [www.pattiwood.net](http://www.pattiwood.net) for the link.

*Source: Wrigley’s Spearmint Gum survey, conducted by Harris Interactive, called 1,028 randomly chosen U.S. households the weekend of July 19 – 22, 2002. The margin of error was +/- 3.1 percent.

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