

Children's dental health month

How to create a wholesome food environment. by Dr. Susan Maples

B

y now our New Year's Resolutions are mostly blown and Children's Dental Health Month is here again. It's time to say goodbye to fad diets and build a safe home for your children—which includes creating a wholesome food environment.

I just finished reading *Fat Chance*, by Robert Lustig, a pediatric endocrinologist and childhood obesity specialist. Lustig makes it clear that sugar is the big ugly issue. High-sugar, low-fiber foods drive an insulin spike, causing us to store fat. Chronic sugar intake causes insulin-resistance, diabetes and weight gain. In addition it leads to metabolic syndrome, the collective package of killers: diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, cancer and dementia.

Nature made sugar hard to get. Man made it easy. In nature it's locked in sugar cane, fruits, some vegetables and honey. The first three sources are loaded with fiber and the third is protected by bees. Man refined it and by 2014 has added it to almost every processed food on the shelf! This is precisely why obesity and obesity-related illnesses have skyrocketed. Unfortunately it won't change any time soon, as increased sugar consumption means increased manufacturer profits. The food industries win, the distributors win and we all lose...or gain, as is the case.

Prior to 1960 the known sugar-associated dangers were focused on tooth decay. In 1945 water fluoridation came to the rescue. Since then our sugar consumption has gone through the roof. Total sugar consumption zoomed neck-and-neck with the obesity rates in North America.

Oh, and the cavity rate climbed too. About one third of all toddlers today have active and progressing tooth decay, causing kids to collectively lose 51 million school hours a year.

By puberty, a child exposed to chronic sugar intake develops insulin resistance. Add to that independent decision-making and peer pressure...game over! Fat for life! (Incidentally, Fat For Life was the title of the Newsweek magazine cover story July, 2000 and now, 13 years later the number of seriously overweight kids in the US has more than doubled.) Get mad about that and help the children you love TODAY!



Dr. Maples Tips to Curb Sugar

Start by eliminating ALL sweetened beverages. Eliminate soda; it is purely a fructose (and caffeine) delivery vehicle. Eliminate fruit juice; eat real fruit instead. Fruit contains fiber which again mitigates that insulin response.

Google the 40 "other names for sugar" and get familiar with hidden sources of sugar in the ingredients list.

Identify and reduce hidden sugars in "healthy" snacks, such as yogurt and chocolate milk.

Start buying real food (vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and lean proteins). These require no labels or ingredient lists. You will find these mostly on the perimeters of the grocery store. Michael Pollan's rules from his book *Food Rules* is "If your grandmother wouldn't recognize it as food, it isn't." If your family eats real food, your weight will take care of itself.

Google good sources of soluble and insoluble fiber such as whole grains, vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds and legumes.

Prepare to shop. Make a list and adhere to it. When you do buy any processed food, use a guide or a smart phone app to help you. Try the app Fooducate which scans any bar code and gives you (or your kids) a letter grade. It even helps you identify better alternatives on the same shelf.

Don't take the bait. Remember that typical diets don't work. Also know that virtually all anti-obesity interventions work better in young children. Keep working toward a healthier lifestyle.

Your first challenge is to curb total sugar consumption and thereby dial the insulin down. The next is to increase fiber (and thereby micronutrients) which helps slow the absorption of sugar and moderates the insulin thrust. All this metabolic biochemistry begins with what you eat. Focus on permanently altering your relationship with the supermarket,

grocery store, convenience store, restaurant and fast food joint.



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