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Not so sweet

Sugary drinks are destroying teeth and adding weight. *By Dr Susan Maples*

Happy New Year. On January 5th I examined 17 college students (home for winter break) and all but one had new cavities. By the end of the day I just wanted to cry. Instead, I'm crying out to you: C'mon everyone, let's wake up to the fact that sweet drinks are literally destroying our teeth and packing on the pounds!

This message is for all of us, not just teenagers. Americans are consuming an average of 130 to 260 more calories a day than 20 years ago (130 for adult women and 260 for teen boys). If you do the math on unburned calories stored to fat, that's the equivalent of 14 to 28 pounds per person—per year. So where are we finding these additional calories? While our fat consumption is going down our sugar consumption is steadily rising. Get this: Americans are consuming an average of 141 POUNDS of sugar a year. Much of this is in beverage consumption. In a decade (!) we experienced a 41% increase in soft drinks and a 35% increase in fruit drinks. The calories in these are almost purely from high fructose corn syrup (HFCS), a corn derivative that is cheap and has found its way into just about everything. It's hard to find a loaf of bread or a bottle of catsup without fructose in it, let alone soda, "juice" or sweet tea. HFCS doesn't "act" like real food. It doesn't stimulate the fat cell hormone (leptin) that tells the brain "I'm finished—NO MORE!"

So it's 2012 and we are experiencing two closely linked disastrous epidemics: tooth decay and obesity. Will you help me fight this? Please spread the word to make the **5-2-1-0 initiative** a household term. It is an easy number to remember and it represents four simple daily recommendations for children (and adults too):

- Eat **5** servings of fruits and vegetables
- Spend no more than **2** hours of sedentary TV/computer time
- Get at least **1** hour of physical activity
- Drink **0** sugar-sweetened beverages

Zero tolerance for sweet drinks? Yes and it is arguably the most important factor fighting obesity, caries, and type II diabetes! Grab a megaphone in your own kitchen, schools and neighborhoods. Bust the myths that sports drinks and juice are healthy choices. Stop buying soda. Lets all help our kids see a healthier new year in 2013.