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# Childhood Obesity

It's everyone's problem. How you can help. *By Dr. Susan Maples.*

Childhood obesity is everyone's problem! I am passionately dedicated to helping the dental and medical professions team together in this fight to save lives. You may wonder how childhood obesity intersects with dentistry. I hardly know where to start.

First, tooth decay. Did you know that the biggest food-culprit in the upwardly trending weight crisis is the very same ingredient boosting dental disease? You guessed it----high-fructose corn syrup. Americans are consuming an average of 63 pounds per person, per year of the stuff, primarily in juice, sports drinks and soda.

Childhood obesity stimulates a cascade of other lifestyle illnesses like diabetes, hypertension, sleep apnea, acid reflux, depression and osteoporosis, to name a few. Without the time, tools or courage to affront obesity, physicians are called to medicate these diseases and 400+ of these lifestyle illness meds stimulate dry mouth as a side effect. Saliva shut-down ratchets up tooth decay with a vengeance!

If watching kids get sicker during my tenure as a dentist has not been enough to keep me awake at night, the worry about our health care cost projection is. Right now 17 percent of our kids are obese and it is projected that 85 percent of these kids will be morbidly obese (100 pounds overweight) by age 30. If we think we are in a health care cost crisis now, just wait. Statistically, most of us spend the majority of our health care dollars in the last year of our life. Just imagine the projected costs for continual medical treatment of these obesity-linked diseases on a young adult population. It will be mind-blowing.

So, I'm just a dentist. Too small to stand up to the corn lobbyists, the FDA, the tobacco growers or their lobbyists. But with my time and concern, I can impact the health of my people, one child at a time. And so can you! Stay curious with kids about what they want: energy? smarts? sports performance? attractiveness? health? When you learn that their current health status does not match their desired future, help them seek some answers for a future they will love. Kids dig science.

One more plea: Help me in the plight to get our health care and education teams on board. If you know someone working in medicine, dentistry, or education who interfaces with children, encourage them to get involved. A recent cover story in the Journal of the American Dental Association says 50 percent of dentists want to address obesity in patient care but only 1.6 percent do anything towards it. Why? Primarily there is a sense of inadequacy; lack of training/expertise and lack of appropriate tools. Please encourage your influential friends to learn more, and to get involved as if their own future depended on it.

Our kids are our future.

Let's give 'em all we have!