



CDA Position on **Junk Food and Child Health**

Preamble

Traditionally the problem of dental disease, especially in children, has been regarded in isolation and as a simple cause and effect statement: increased sugar = increased cavities. However, the reality is much more complex. Eating habits are just as important as foods consumed. “Junk foods” that are low in nutritional value and high in carbohydrates, and beverages with high sugar content and acidity such as fruit juices, sports and energy drinks and sodas can cause significant caries and erosion to tooth enamel, especially when consumed frequently and over time.

The role of oral health in overall health is important, and the impact of poor nutrition reaches well beyond dental caries. When children have cavities and/or gum disease and resulting pain, they may be less likely to eat harder healthy foods such as meat and vegetables, and more likely to seek comfort in treats and beverages – creating a vicious circle. Children with dental disease may also have trouble sleeping and concentrating in school, and the effects of early dental disease remain a liability beyond the childhood years. When teeth are lost prematurely or succumb to serious decay, there is a negative outcome on the development of adult teeth.

Co-existing health concerns such as diabetes and obesity must also be considered. Research shows a relationship between dental caries and obesity, as well as a relationship between gum diseases and diabetes, with the disease cycle of each negatively affecting the other. Significantly, dental diseases, type II Diabetes and obesity are all preventable.

CDA Position

CDA supports measures aimed at promoting healthy eating based on Canada’s Food Guide, increased physical activity and access to oral care. CDA also supports measures aimed at reducing consumption of so-called “junk foods”. Creating new health partnerships will be important to achieving these goals. Health providers including dentists and physicians, governments, parents, and school systems should seek innovative opportunities to work cooperatively towards improved child health.

Approved
CDA Board of Directors
August 2007