



Candy bank, one way to sweeten kids

by George Meinig, D.D.S.

Dear Dr. Meinig: My husband and I are in agreement with you about the health dangers to our children from candy, sweets, and all the junk food that is so available today. We don't have any problem with it in our home as we have eliminated purchasing such things, but everywhere they go, people try to buy their love by giving them sugar-laden cookies, candy, cokes and lollypops.

We are beginning to worry that our continual preaching about the dangers of these foods may end up having adverse emotional effects on our children or even that they will adopt some kind of backlash use of these things when they are older and on their own. I'm sure from all you have written that you have some thoughts about this dilemma. Is there a solution? J.S.

Dear J.S.: Yes, there is a solution but before I tell you how my family handled these questions, let me congratulate you and your husband for seeing the problem and accepting the responsibility of doing something about it. It seems to me that the biggest difficulty is parents who continually tell their children to "STOP EATING SO MANY SWEETS." Then the mother and dad go right on eating those same things themselves. It should be obvious that if such foods and beverages are not available in the home, they can't be used by anyone in the family.

Let me assure you that the scientific medical and dental literature is crammed full of thousands of research studies that substantiate connections between what we eat and the status of our health. Far too many people assume that if they don't have the outright manifestations of a disease, they are healthy. Absence of sickness doesn't necessarily mean good health. Forgotten

are the frequent common colds, stuffy-runny noses, earaches, hyperactivity, underactivity, tooth decay, obesity, constipation, uncooperativeness, allergy, etc.

To stop these common afflictions from occurring in our home, we adopted a family nutrition plan. It started by clearing the kitchen of sweets, cornflakes, puffed rice, doughnuts, sweet rolls, white bread, soft drinks and all such fabricated foods. This didn't leave the cupboards bare because they were immediately stocked with plenty of natural foods in the form of fresh vegetables, 100 percent whole grain cereals, old-fashioned aged cheese, nuts of all kinds, sunflower and pumpkin seeds and fresh fruit.

The availability of all these natural foods slowed down the clamor for sweets but when a request did come along it usually had to be refused if the family nutrition plan was to achieve better health. No matter how diplomatic the refusal, each daughter's reply was always the same, "But Daddy, it's so good." Incidentally, conversations with adults about similar matters found them responding with the same line. Our failure to effectively communicate the harm that nutrient deficient foods had upon health left me distraught and unhappy. Worry about handling these remarks was suddenly resolved one evening when I answered my daughters', "But it's so good" saying "I must admit, Judy, that sweet dessert you desire is quite TASTY, but I think you will agree, it isn't good."

When our girls tried to decline offers of improper foods saying "My dad won't let me eat sweets" we found it didn't work very well. Even a polite "no thank you" resulted in sales pitches for acceptance of the confection offered, so it was obvious that our well laid plans to stop a three-year-old daughter's tooth decay ran into a major obstacle.

As adults we, too, learned how difficult it was to say "no" when offers of fabricated food snacks came our way. Even when we were allergic to the item presented, our refusal elicited disbelief. It is often said that necessity is the mother of invention. After much soul searching, in order to help solve the mental conflict my girls faced in learning how to make wise food selections and refuse bad ones, I developed "The Candy Bank" idea.

What we did was to purchase a small coin piggy bank for each of our daughters. They were advised that if someone offered them a "not-so-good goody", to accept and say they were going to save the item for after

lunch or dinner. They would bring the snack home and we would ask about the circumstance of its presentation and then, depending on the stress of the situation, would offer to buy the item for 5, 10, or 25 cents. This money was deposited in their individual piggy bank. They were informed that they could take the money out of the piggy bank at any time and buy whatever they desired except, of course, sweets. We did nothing to guide them in making these purchases, feeling this an opportunity to learn the value of money. No matter how foolish the purchase might be, it wasn't as foolish as the junk food they gave up.

When my daughters attended parties, and found it would be difficult to bring home what was served, they only had to tell us they didn't drink the soft drink, or eat the cake, the ice cream or other confection and we would reimburse them for an amount thought fair and reasonably generous under the stress they had undergone. In this way they developed a willing desire to say "No thank you" to at least a part of the sweets served.

With experience, we found that most children can't wait until they have enough money in their candy bank so that they can go out and buy something. Our oldest, Judy, was one of these. Susan, on the other hand, was a saver and she let it build and build until she was able to purchase a Schwinn bicycle.

Most mothers and fathers will see the soundness of this proposal, but let me remind

you, in practice it has a flaw. Initially, it doesn't work. The reason is that young children usually have had little experience in making purchases for themselves. They haven't

learned the value of money. Consequently, in the beginning, they often reject the idea of giving up those tantalizing sweets. Don't be discouraged. The next time they pester you to buy something that you object to, just say "No, we can't do that today - wouldn't it be nice if you had some money in your candy bank so that you could buy it for yourself?" A few such reminders and they will be disappointed when no one offers them any junk food.

One of the big decisions for mom and dad is deciding what to do with the candy or cookies they bring home. After you have negotiated and made payment for the snack, don't save it for yourself for later, but ceremoniously dump it in the trash can and let them see you do it. They will then grasp the

idea that it is really junk food -- fit only for rubbish.

Should your children go trick or treating on Halloween, they will be delighted to see you making the big pay-off when they hand you that bag of sickening sweets. Be generous. My 5, 10, and 25 cent payments to Judy and Susan took place before inflation, so you will have to experiment and adopt amounts that fit the time and your family circumstances.

The candy bank was a tremendous help to our youngsters and to many in my practice, as it enabled them to develop sound dietary habits. Learning how to say "No thank you" to the usual handouts of snacks and desserts is no small accomplishment. As these ideas became easier and easier to carry out, a new fear concerned us. We began to see

that enthusiasm for the benefits to health that were taking place could lead to an over-zealous and anti-social behavior, not so much by the children but by the parents. We reminded Judy and Susan that on festive occasions their hostess probably had spent the whole day preparing the menu. We suggested that there could be times when they should consider the propriety of ignoring the usual rule. We assured them that an occasional dessert would not create havoc. Rather, it is the little bit of sweets in which one partakes every day that is dangerous, as that "little" we think we are using grows into ever and ever larger amounts that compound into real health problems.

When exceptions occur only occasionally, you will find your sons and daughters blossoming into beautiful children. They will have rosy complexions, be full of fun and vitality, will have teeth free from decay, gums that are pink and healthy, will experience fewer colds and illnesses, and if they do get a flu-bug, recovery will be faster than usual. The nicest thing of all is that natural living foods have no detrimental side effects - A GREAT WAY TO START A SUPER LIFE FOR YOUR CHILDREN.

[Everyone has a question about nutrition. Send yours to Dr. George E. Meinig, c/o Ojai Valley News, Box 277, Ojai, CA, 93023]