

LETTER

I WANT TO BE A GOOD MOTHER

To the Editor: 'I want to be a good mother' is a universal fundamental need of motherhood. Daily, mothers around the world are faced with choices and strive towards finding a balance between providing their children with what they want, versus what moms really believe to be best for the harmonious development (mental and physical) of their children and within their financial means.

While mothers may have a general understanding of good nutrition, they may lack information with regard to specific nutrients.¹ Mothers are conscious that a well-balanced diet is important to keep their children happy and healthy. For example, moms are in agreement that getting kids off in the morning with a good healthy breakfast is important. Breakfast cereal is rated as healthy among 82% of the developed market and 84% of emergent market consumers, and is acknowledged to provide children with energy and a combination of the iron, calcium and vitamins needed for growth and development.² However, consumers do not tend to associate cereals with key nutrition attributes such as vitamins, carbohydrates and fibre.¹

In particular, because moms have negative associations with the colour, shape and flavour of pre-sweetened cereals (sugar coating, chocolate etc.), it biases their judgement with regard to the nutritional value of such cereals.³ So although children really enjoy these cereals, mothers appear to feel comfortable only when they give their kids pre-sweetened cereal for breakfast as a treat. Concerns about sugar making children 'hyper' as well as other sugar-related issues still trouble many moms, despite the fact these misconceptions have been extensively researched and found to be unfounded.^{4,5} In fact, the American Dietetic Association and the US Food and Drug Administration's Sugar Task Force have concluded that there is no convincing evidence that sugar consumption changes behaviour. With the exception of dental caries, research has also determined that sugar, as part of a balanced diet, does not contribute to other health issues such as obesity or diabetes. And, of course, the impact of carbohydrates apart from sugar, on dental caries is dependent on the type of food, frequency of consumption, oral hygiene practices, salivary function and genetic factors.

In view of the great need for nutrition education in the country, as identified by the National Food Consumption Survey conducted among children aged 1 - 9 years,⁶ Kellogg's has adopted a multifaceted approach to delivering a relevant nutrition message to mothers, children and opinion leaders on the issue of breakfast cereals, including pre-sweetened cereals. The key focus of this activity is on the importance of a ready-to-eat cereal breakfast for children to promote their mental and physical development. The prime aim of this activity is to place sugar consumption, in relation to health, in the correct perspective and in accordance with the latest available scientific evidence as summarised in the most recent Food and

Drug Administration (FDA) report, namely 'Evaluation of the health aspects of sugars contained in carbohydrate sweeteners'. This comprehensive assessment concludes that sugar does not cause diabetes, heart disease, obesity, hypoglycaemia, childhood hyperactivity or nutrient deficiencies. Following the FDA's 1988 affirmation that sugar be 'Generally Recognised as Safe' (GRAS), several major nutrition policy statements accepted and incorporated the FDA's conclusions, including:

- Report on Nutrition and Health by the US Surgeon General
- Diet Health by the National Research Council (National Academy of Sciences)
- Healthy People 2000: National Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Objectives by the US Department of Health and Human Services
- Nutrition and Your Health: Dietary Guidelines for Americans 1995 by the Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services

Copies of the FDA report are available on request from: Marlinie Kotiah, Private Bag X16, Gallo Manor, 2052 or fax 011-233 6702 or www.fda.gov

Marlinie Kotiah

Nutrition Manager; Kellogg's South Africa

References

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