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Current Topics in
Food Safety and Nutrition

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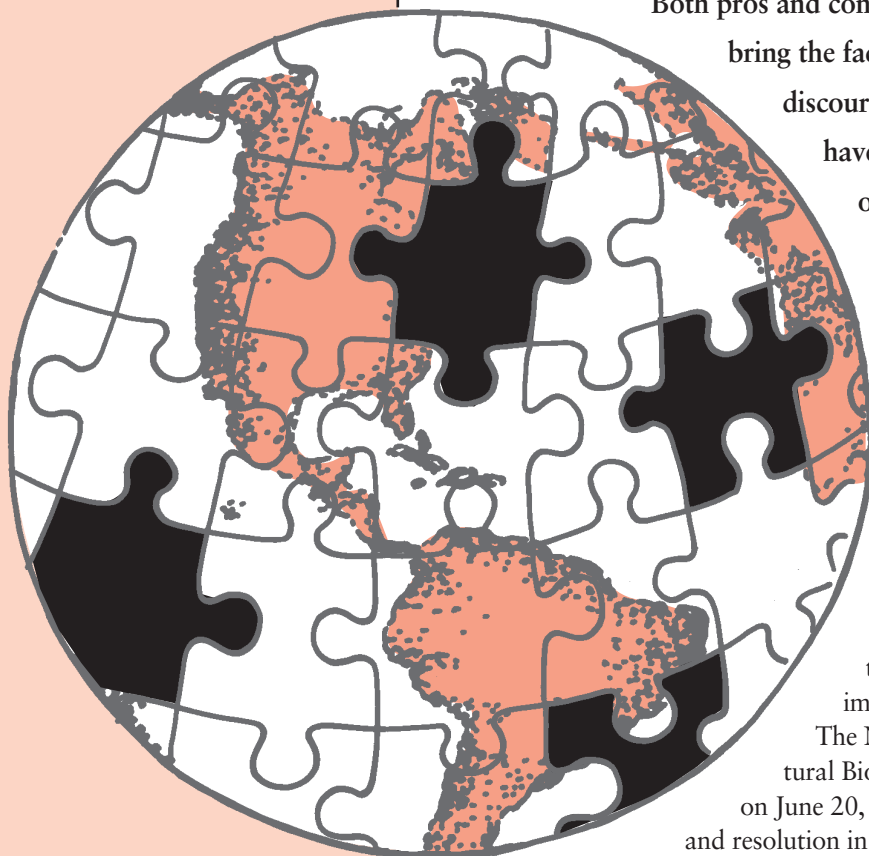
New York Academy of Sciences:

The Challenge of Feeding the World

Mahatma Gandhi once said, “Honest disagreement is often a sign of progress.” This is certainly true of agricultural biotechnology. This past year there have been numerous forums discussing the finer points of agricultural biotechnology.

Both pros and cons of the issue have been raised in an effort to bring the facts about this issue to the forefront of public discourse. As is expected, some of the public debates have been productive, increasing understanding of and clarifying some of the misinformation about the issues surrounding agricultural biotechnology. Others have been more along the lines of a public venting of anger, myths, and dire predictions.

All of these discussions are necessary to move the important issue forward. Of note, a meeting this summer at the New York Academy of Sciences (NYAS) raised the level of discourse on the evolving issue of food biotechnology beyond misinformation and distrust, to looking at what is truly critical—the impact of the technology on the developing world. The NYAS press background briefing titled “Agricultural Biotechnology and the Developing Countries,” held on June 20, 2000, was a forum for honest discussion, debate and resolution in the area of agricultural biotechnology and its real value to the world.



A New Conversation with Consumers:

Highlights from a Nutrition Communications Roundtable

Ask anyone about what they *like to eat* and you'll probably hear excitement and passion about a favorite subject and pastime. When asked about *nutrition*, however, people typically lose their enthusiasm—and appetite—as they express a variety of negative emotions.

Why the disconnect between food and nutrition? "It's really not surprising," reported Sylvia Rowe, president and chief executive officer of the International Food Information Council (IFIC). "Consumers are deluged with conflicting advice, they're confused about who to listen to, and perhaps most important, they're tired of the instructions—of being lectured to on what they should and shouldn't eat."

Further evidence that we're losing consumers in our communications efforts is evidenced by the emotions that consumers convey when discussing their diets. During focus groups conducted by IFIC, consumers confessed that they feel guilt, worry, fear, anger, and helplessness when it comes to nutrition and their diets. While The American Dietetic Association's *Nutrition Trends Survey 2000* found that nutrition is personally important to at least 85 percent of American consumers. Despite this, only 28 percent say that they have made significant changes to achieve a healthful diet.

Some of the country's leading experts on consumer trends, consumer behavior, the culinary arts, and consumer research, marketing, and advertising recently gathered for a roundtable discussion to talk about the state of nutrition communications and an approach to the development of nutrition messages with consumer input. A nutrition roundtable, held in Washington, D.C., on August 24, entitled *A New Conversation with Consumers*, was sponsored by the IFIC Foundation and Dietitians in Business and Communications, a practice group of The American Dietetic Association.

The Consumer's Point of View

The path of nutrition communications often follows a one-way street. Communicators talk "to" consumers with little understanding about how—or even if—these messages have an effect. "We've learned that successfully communicating and motivating behavior requires knowing what consumers are thinking and feeling about their food choices, why they make the choices they do, and how they respond to nutrition messages," said Susan Borra, RD, senior vice president and director of nutrition at IFIC. "To do this, we need to begin a new conversation—to talk *with* consumers rather than *at* them."

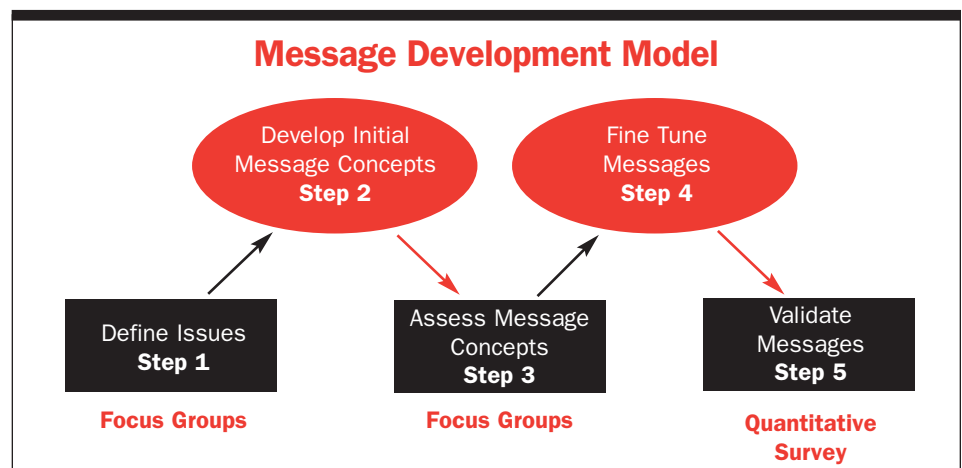
Advertisers and marketers often use a five-step process to obtain consumer input about a potential product or campaign. "It makes sense to apply this technique to nutrition communications," said Peter Mitchell, an expert in qualitative research and senior vice president and group head for Strategy One/Edelman Public Relations. "In fact, it has been used successfully to develop nutrition messages that really work—the "It's All About You" campaign of the Dietary Guidelines Alliance is an excellent example." At the core of this message development process is a *dialogue* with consumers.

Step 1: Define the issues.

This critical step entails getting to know *what* your audience thinks and why so you understand what motivates them. Go beyond the demographics of your audience to the psychographics—information about their lifestyles, family structures, activities, interests, goals, concerns, and barriers. This qualitative research step, involves gathering information through focus groups or by less formal methods, such as talking with various members of your audience.

Step 2: Develop the initial message concepts.

Initial messages are developed on the basis of information gathered in step 1 and the specific actions or behaviors you want the nutrition message to achieve. See the sidebar Take-Home Messages for pointers.



Consumer's Reaction to Negative Nutrition Messages ("Avoid" and "Eliminate") from Man-in-the-Street IFIC Video

"Sometimes you want to just give up because you don't know what to do anymore."

"If I listened to every message 'experts' gave me, I probably would just eat bread and water."

"Because of all the rules, eating has become not as fun as it should be and eating should be fun."

"I am the gatekeeper of my mouth."

Step 3: Assess the message concepts.

Share your messages with members of your actual audience. Again, this can be accomplished through focus groups or by less formal methods such as discussions with colleagues. The following key questions should be answered: "What does this message mean to you?" "Does this message motivate you?" "Does it fit with other things you want in life?"

Step 4: Fine-tune the messages.

If your messages are on target, fine-tuning may be minimal. However, if you find in step 3 that your messages are missing the mark, you may need to go back to step 2.

Step 5: Validate the messages.

This step involves quantitative testing of the messages to confirm that your message resonates with your audience on a broader level. This can be done using a research approach, such as a phone survey, or less formally by presenting the messages to a larger audience and collecting feedback data.

Nutrition communicators should no longer simply provide information to consumers and hope for change. To enable the behavior changes you want to achieve, pull up a chair, have a conversation with consumers, listen, listen, listen—and learn. Then deliver your messages with confidence knowing that the messages have been developed with consumer input.

Excerpts from Experts

Experts in trends, human behavior, and culinary arts offer the following words of wisdom in regard to nutrition communications.

"The challenge is change."

"Consumers are a moving target," said Michael Sansolo, senior vice president of the Food Marketing Institute and an expert on monitoring trends. "They're constantly changing the way they eat—how and where they're buying their food, where they're eating meals, and how they're preparing their food. And their sources of nutrition information are changing too. It's clear that we can't effectively communicate our messages if we don't know our audience."

"It's about the food."

"Food is to be enjoyed and celebrated, not feared and isolated," stressed David Feder, editor of *Lightstyle* magazine, who is also a registered dietitian and chef. "In reality, the concept of good food and bad food sells—newspapers, TV spots, magazines, food products. The gray area of science is what's harder to sell. But science should never get in the way of eating well and healthfully. It can't be said enough that we need to communicate nutrition with good taste. If we forget to talk about the food, even the most interested and motivated consumers will tune out."

"Understand the consumer psyche."

"Consumers often create their own 'shortcuts' or rules of thumb for making choices when faced with an overload of information," said Paul Rozin, Ph.D., professor of psychology and researcher of human food choice at the University of Pennsylvania. "For instance, if a food contains a nutrient or ingredient that can cause harm (if it is consumed) in large amounts, then some believe that it is better not to eat it, even in small amounts. The consumers' desire to dichotomize the world into good and bad foods is probably an outcome of information overload and confusion."

"Channel the demand."

"Take the time to understand underlying consumer motivations behind the trends," said Myron Lyskanycz, executive vice president of Leo Burnett USA. "Once you learn what drives consumers and what they want to know, you can create messages that channel their nutrition demands to appropriate solutions or actions. In the advertising world, consumers must 'approve' any campaign or promotion before it goes to market. The same should hold true for nutrition messages."

Take-Home Messages for Developing Consumer Messages that Work

Use these pointers to develop insightful messages that affect consumer behavior.

- Speak in a language that is straightforward, relevant, and compelling to the audience.
- Show consumers how to incorporate nutrition knowledge into everyday life by providing practical, easy-to-implement strategies.
- Customize messages by giving specific reasons, meaningful to the audience, for changing behaviors. For example, talk about the benefits of taste, convenience, fun, culture, or feeling good.
- Offer choices for making behavior changes. Consumers are empowered when they can make their own choices.

The Challenge of Feeding the World

Continued from page 1

On October 12, 1999, the world celebrated the birth of its six billionth human being, a doubling of the world's population since 1960. Today, however, an estimated 800 million people do not have enough to eat. By 2050 the earth's population is expected to grow by a minimum of 50 percent with little additional land suitable for farming. What does all of this mean?

With an ever-growing number of mouths to feed and with the even more limited means to feed those persons, a more sustainable, more economical, and more environmentally friendly method of producing food is needed. "There is no question about the demand for food and the need to eat.

The problem comes in the means of meeting the demand,"

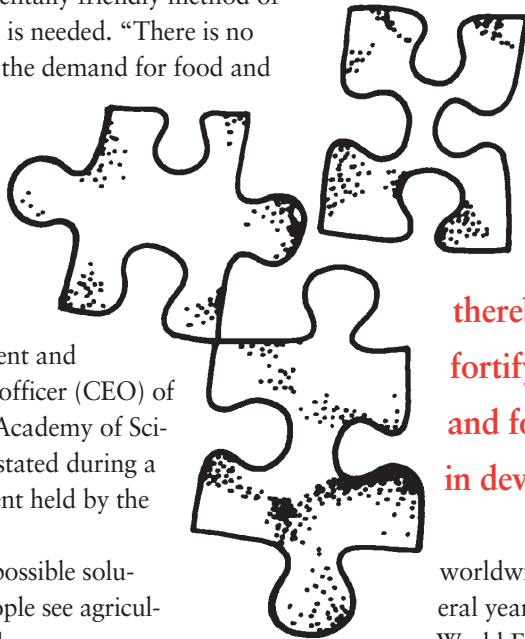
Rodney W. Nichols, president and chief executive officer (CEO) of the New York Academy of Sciences (NYAS), stated during a recent press event held by the Academy.

Among the possible solutions, many people see agricultural biotechnology as one solution to the problem of feeding the world's inhabitants. Agricultural biotechnology is the use of modern genetics in the age-old process of improving plants and microorganisms for food production.

Although many see the benefits and potential of agricultural biotechnology, others do not. Nichols worries that "hyperbole is driving solid evidence out of public view." In turn, this creates a sense of distrust of science in the minds of the public and causes the evidence concerning agricultural biotechnology to become politicized.

The briefing began with an introduction by Rodney Nichols as well as presentations from Per Pinstrup-Andersen of the International Food Policy Research Institute and Charles Arntzen, Ph.D., president and CEO of the Boyce Thompson Institute for Plant Research. After the presentations, Ira Flatow of *National Public Radio* moderated a six-member panel discussion.

Dr. Per Pinstrup-Andersen captured the growing concerns of developing nations with a review of the disturbing numbers concerning worldwide population growth, food insecurity and the demand for food



Agricultural biotechnology is merely one piece of the solution: it has the potential to develop crops that are drought tolerant and self-fertilizing, thereby increasing overall yield. It is also capable of fortifying crops with nutrients needed for basic health and for delivering much needed vaccines to people living in developing countries.

worldwide. He noted that several years ago, during the World Food Summit, numerous heads of state determined that the number of food-insecure people needed to drop to 400 million by 2015. In reality, the decline in food insecurity is happening at a much slower rate and the total number of food-insecure people by 2010 is expected to fall to only 680 million.

He also suggests that developed countries are part of the problem for the much slower than anticipated decline and stated that "reducing hunger, food insecurity and child death due to malnutrition is not a high priority in very many countries around the world."

Pinstrup-Andersen reported that not every country needs to be self-sufficient in food production if they have other sources of income to afford the importation of staple items. For instance, many countries rely on the manufacturing capabilities of their large urban populations to compensate for a lack in rural farming production.

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According to Dr. Arntzen our ancestors were the original experimenters; they domesticated plants such as the tomato and the potato. Originally, potatoes contained alkaloids that are harmful to humans, but our ancestors removed them through crop breeding. The downfall was that the alkaloids were also natural pesticides and fungicides. Thus, the potatoes were safe for human consumption, but were more susceptible to pests and spoilage.

For years the potato crop has been treated with a series of insecticide sprays to kill off the insects and prevent disease, but such treatments are costly and potentially damaging to the environment.

Through the use of biotechnology, we have the ability to add the *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) gene to the plant. The incorporation of the Bt gene naturally wards off pests and spoilage that result in crop loss in many developing countries. Another advantage to using the Bt gene is that it encodes a host-specific protein that is not harmful to humans and causes adverse effects only in a certain population of insect pests.

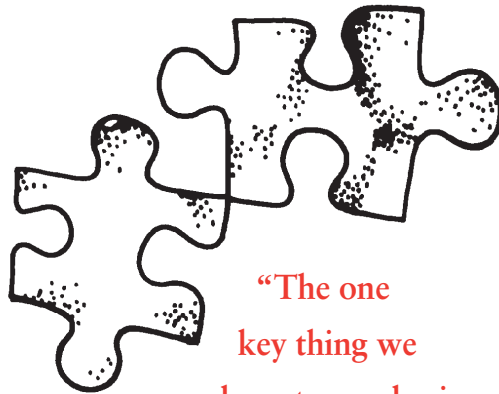
“The one key thing we have to emphasize with biotechnology [is that] the technology has a high cost up-front, but once it is created, it is captured in the seed and only the seed needs to be distributed,” emphasized Arntzen. He also believes that there is a great deal of opportunity in agricultural biotechnology, especially in developing countries—to stabilize food costs and add nutrients to food.

In contrast to the many people who believe in and discuss the benefits of agricultural biotechnology, Rebecca Goldberg, Ph.D., of the Environmental Defense Fund expressed the view that environmental questions need to be answered through research and studies. She also suggested that biotechnology as a whole needs greater and more long-term examination as well as stricter governmental regulation.

“While biotechnology can enable scientists to do some unusual things, it is not the panacea it is often advertised to be,” stated Goldberg. She believes that the shortcomings in feeding the world are the result of social and political issues involving food distribution, not the technology used to grow the food or the amount of food grown. In conclusion, Goldberg stated, “Some efforts are well-intentioned, but I see the role of biotechnology as being very limited.”

Dr. Calestous Juma of Harvard University is in agreement with Goldberg in terms of the fact that countries and politics getting in the way of feeding the world, but

sees the problem as a lack of international cooperation. The root of the problem is that “some countries are reluctant to



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include a biotechnology component in their development assistance because they are afraid the Green parties will attack them,” according to Juma.

This political division places developing countries in a tough position because conventional research and biotechnology research often take place in the same laboratory. Some developed countries are reluctant to take part in or to help fund this research, because it might have a biotechnology component. “This has an overall negative impact on the development cooperation in general and developing countries in particular,” states Juma.

Juma believes there is a future for biotechnology; however, there needs to be an explanation of the technology, a debate on the subject, development from private enterprise and interaction from the public

sector to allow the use of biotechnology in the developing world.

“The problem is not with the potential of biotechnology to feed the world; it is with the gap between the potential and the current reality of how the technology is developing,” according to Tony Laviña, Ph.D., of the World Resources Institute. He also believes that agricultural biotechnology can help with the resolution of food security and environmental issues within the next 10 to 15 years.

Laviña states that “the challenge is how to make the technology available to developing countries. We need to create biotechnology solutions to deal with problems relevant to developing nations and to make it affordable to their farmers.”

Terry Medley, vice president of Biotechnology Regulatory and External Affairs of DuPont and former administrator of the United States Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service stated, “We face a number of challenges ... one of which is food security.” Biotechnology is a tool with many applications and is capable of solving food insecurity problems in a safe way. For this to happen there needs to be cooperation among the scientific community, regulatory agencies and public policy makers. Medley also emphasized that cooperation must raise public confidence through an integration of technology and science-based information as well as a right to choose when it comes to food.

There is no doubt that there is a problem concerning food insecurity. There is also no doubt that solutions need to be found. The question is how agricultural biotechnology will best fit into the puzzle and help contribute to much needed solutions.

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NewsBites

More Evidence Points to Safety of Caffeine

Over the past several decades thousands of studies have probed the relationship between caffeine and health. Any possible links between caffeine and health risks, however, have proved elusive, suggesting that most people who enjoy moderate amounts of caffeine can continue to do so without cause for concern.

So why the continued confusion about caffeine? It may be the result of a handful of studies with equivocal results that have been interpreted in the media to have negative consequences of caffeine consumption. Three recent studies, however, add to the overwhelming body of evidence that moderate amounts of caffeine are not associated with health risks. In fact, caffeine may even have a protective effect on health when it comes to Parkinson's disease (PD).

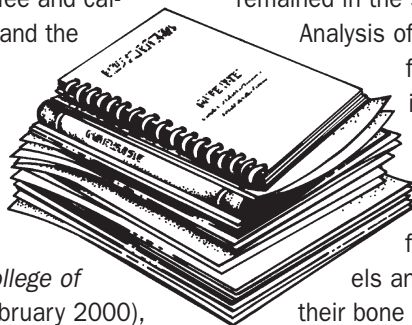
A study reported in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (May 2000) found that higher levels of coffee and caffeine intake is linked to a lower incidence of PD. Study participants were part of the Honolulu Heart Program cohort, a longitudinal study of 8006 men of Japanese ancestry, 45 to 68 years old, living on the island of Oahu in

Hawaii. Researchers analyzed 30 years of follow-up data to study caffeine's effect on the incidence of PD. Dietary recalls assessed participants' levels of intakes of caffeine from coffee, tea, carbonated beverages, and other sources. Among the men followed during the 30 years, 102 developed PD. The risk of PD declined with increases in the amounts of caffeine consumed. Other nutrients contained in coffee, including niacin, and ingredients added to coffee (milk and sugar) did not alter the association between coffee and caffeine intake and the risk of PD.

The second study, published in the *Journal of the American College of Nutrition* (February 2000), examined the relationship between long-term caffeine intake and bone status among postmenopausal women. Researchers at the Pennsylvania State College of Medicine designed the study to minimize the effects of variables that can affect bone loss, including smoking, alcohol use, body weight, physical activity, and hormone replacement therapy (HRT).

Upon entry into the study,

participants classified their usual caffeine intake as low, moderate, or high (equivalent to zero to two cups, three to four cups, or five or more cups of caffeinated coffee per day, respectively). Participants with various levels of physical activity were also recruited to control for the effects of exercise on bone density. Data were collected using 3-day diet records and bone measurements at two time points separated by 2 years; 138 women were seen at visit 1 and 92 women returned for visit 2 and remained in the sample.



Analysis of the results found no significant relationship between the participants' caffeine intake levels and changes in their bone density measurements from the first to the second study visit. When the results were analyzed on basis of high and low calcium intake levels, researchers observed no differences in bone loss by level of caffeine intake. The findings from this study add to the evidence that caffeine is not a risk factor for bone loss in women.

Finally, a third study (reported in more detail in a past issue of *Food Insight*) explored the belief that unpleasant "withdrawal" symptoms are common when regular caffeine

consumption is abruptly stopped. The study, published in the *Journal of Pharmacology* (December 1999), was designed to determine the frequency with which symptoms of caffeine withdrawal occur and their clinical significance. The study involved a community-based telephone survey of 11,112 people, followed by a double-blind controlled study of 57 regular caffeine users with a self-reported history of caffeine withdrawal symptoms. Throughout, participants were unaware of the study's focus on caffeine withdrawal.

In the phone survey, about 1 in 10 daily caffeine consumers reported symptoms of caffeine withdrawal if they stopped consuming caffeine abruptly.

Among the 18 subjects in the group from whom caffeine was suddenly withdrawn, only 6 subjects reported changes in mood and physical symptoms previously associated with caffeine withdrawal. The results of this study suggest that even among regular caffeine users who believe that they will experience caffeine withdrawal, the frequency and severity of symptoms are inconsistent and less than expected.

The widespread availability of caffeine-containing foods and beverages will likely fuel the continued scrutiny of caffeine. Current scientific research indicates it's safe to conclude that consumers can continue to enjoy their coffee, tea, and caffeinated soft drinks in moderation without worry.

WHAT'S NEW at <http://ifinfo.health.org?>

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Child Safety

As anyone who takes care of young children can tell you, kids can get into things in the blink of an eye. Installing “baby” gates, electrical socket plugs, cabinet locks and bed rails, and consistently using car seats and bicycle helmets are safety measures that most parents and child caregivers routinely employ. Keeping kids safe from choking hazards is critical too—and not just at mealtimes.

While anyone can choke, it’s more common in children. “Children 4 years old and under are at the highest risk for choking,” says Ronald Kleinman, MD, chief of pediatric gastroenterology and nutrition at Massachusetts General Hospital. According to Kleinman, young children have small airways, making them vulnerable to choking in two ways. “At

this age, if a large, hard object is swallowed it can compress the small airway, as well as lodge in the airway itself,” explains Kleinman.

Choking is not only frightening for both the child and the parent or caregiver, but it can also be life threatening. Like many health threats, prevention is the best medicine. Here are a few suggestions for keeping children safe from choking.

“Babyproofing” and Supervision

Infants and young children (sometimes up to 4 years old) explore their world by putting things in their mouths—a normal, but potentially dangerous practice. Prevention helps but since it’s impossible to prevent infants from mouthing toys and other objects—and not recommended because it’s a primary way they learn about their environment—it’s essential that the house and childcare setting be “babyproofed” by the time a child reaches about 4 months of age.

“Babyproofing” is equally important

for older children. The greater mobility and independence of older children makes babyproofing just as important, if not more so. The toddler-to-preschool-age group: has an extremely limited understanding of consequences or danger. According to Kleinman, toddlers are especially at risk for dangerous misjudgments. “The 1- to 2 1/2-year olds often put large things in their mouths without thinking about how difficult it might be for them to swallow the object,” notes Kleinman.

Older children, age 4 to 7 years, are not immune to choking risks. Children this age are often daring and frequently over-confident about their physical abilities—a potentially hazardous combination. Swallowing coins or other non-food items, and accidentally getting clothing or ties wrapped too tight around their necks or stuck in playground equipment may be more of a hazard for kids in this age group, who often play in less supervised settings.

Continued, next page

New IFIC Foundation Publications

Below are the newest releases from the IFIC Foundation. Single copies of most publications are available free-of-charge. For a comprehensive listing of publications or for bulk prices, please request the IFIC Foundation Publications List below.

Publications List (MI-4010)

A complete list of publications and *Food Insight* reprints available from the IFIC Foundation.

It's All About You Nutrition Communicator's Tool Kit (MI-4230)

A new nutrition communicator's Tool Kit to help consumers achieve healthy, active lifestyles. The Tool Kit illustrates positive, simple, and consistent nutrition and health messages and contains an "Owner's Manual for the Body," Leader's Guide, consumer video, and much more. Please send ___ copies at \$19.95 each, plus \$2.50 shipping and handling. Enclosed is a check for \$_____.

Weight Loss: Finding A Weight Loss Program that Works for You (EB-2090)

This helpful, easy-to-use brochure provides information and check lists for evaluating weight loss programs and services and helps consumers ask the right questions to choose a safe and effective weight loss method.

Food Biotechnology Resource Kit (MI-4080)

This updated and redesigned kit is a compilation of backgrounders on food biotechnology topics, including product benefits, consumer attitudes, federal safeguards and labeling, and the environment. The most recent data on consumer attitudes and government regulatory issues are included. The kit also includes positions of other leading health professional organizations, along with an extensive resource list. Please send ___ copies at \$10.00 each. Enclosed is a check for \$_____.

Starting Solids: A Guide for Parents and Child Care Providers (EB-2020)

This updated brochure not only has an attractive, colorful new look but also has extensive information on transitioning infant feeding from breast milk and formula to solid foods. In addition, the brochure includes information from the American Red Cross on what to do if your child is choking. Co-published with the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Associates and Practitioners

Take Charge of Your Health: A Teenager's Guide to Better Health (EB-2085)

A brochure that helps empower teenagers to making better choices to improve their health and lifestyles. They learn about how to change their snacking habits, increase physical activity and provides guidance to identify serving sizes. Developed by the National Institutes of Health's Weight-control Information Network.

Caffeine and Health: Clarifying the Controversies (IR-3020)

This updated IFIC Review highlights new research, provides background information on caffeine and seeks to dispel misconceptions that exist about the ingredient.

Children's Nutrition and Physical Activity Teaching Set (MI-4200)

A teaching set designed to help kids ages 9-15 understand the importance of combining nutrition and physical activity. The set features a 22"x34" two-sided color poster highlighting the Physical Activity Pyramid alongside the Food Guide Pyramid. Set includes the Ten Tips to Healthy Eating and Physical Activity for You brochure, reproducible slick and poster. Please send ___ copies at \$3.50 and \$1.50 shipping and handling.

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Child Safety *Continued from page 7*

Minimize household risks

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), between 1980 and 1989 146 children died from choking on toys or other children's objects. About 70 percent of those incidents involved balloons, small balls, or marbles.

Keeping inappropriate toys away from young children is imperative for preventing choking. Before purchasing a toy, check the recommended age listed on the package—and abide by it. Also, CPSC recommends immediately disposing of deflated or broken balloons, as even a piece of a balloon can choke a child. Also, all children should be cautioned not to put balloon pieces in their mouths. Alternatively, parents may want to purchase Mylar balloons, which aren't choking hazards, instead of latex ones.

Aside from toys, everyday objects found around the house can pose a choking risk to children. Keeping the house tidy and free of clutter, sweeping and vacuuming

the floor frequently, and storing potentially hazardous items way out of a child's reach are easy steps that should be taken to minimize choking risks.

Mealtime safety

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, children don't learn to chew with a grinding motion until about age 4. Until then, they simply don't have the ability to chew firm, smooth foods or large chunks of food very well. Certain foods present more of a choking risk than others do. Foods which commonly cause choking in young children are generally firm and smooth (grapes, nuts, candies, etc.) or are served in chunks (meats, cheese, vegetables, etc.) Meat can be particularly difficult for a child to chew unless it's cut into very small pieces.

It's not just what the child is eating that causes choking; it's how the child eats. For example, a child who likes the taste of something or is particularly hungry, will

often eat in a rush or try to stuff the whole portion of food into his or her mouth instead of taking normal-sized bites. In these situations, chewing food adequately becomes difficult, and choking can result. For this reason, it's important to serve food in small portions (giving another portion if the child desires it) and to continue to cut up food until the child is old enough to properly cut up his or her own food.

Another common habit of toddlers is sometimes called "pouching," in which the child keeps food in his or her cheeks instead of swallowing it. If the wad of food becomes dislodged, it can pose a choking risk.

Keeping mealtime pleasant, nourishing and safe for kids is an achievable goal. Getting into the habit of preparing and serving safe, age-appropriate foods will go a long way toward keeping children healthy and happy.

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