



Preface

Nutrition and oral health



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Guest Editor

Nutrition is vital to human development, growth, and health maintenance. Nutritional issues, at the forefront of popular culture, are part of the current wellness and health promotion climate. Today, as never before, people are concerned with optimizing their health by acquiring nutritional information and applying it to their daily lives. Yet, with all of the information available in magazines, television, the Internet, and other media, misinformation abounds. People often rely on inaccurate sources to supply them with nutritional information. Nutritional studies are often difficult to conduct, methodologically flawed, and present the public with conflicting conclusions. Obesity and other nutritionally related chronic disorders are on the rise. Health care professionals frequently neglect to inquire about patients' nutritional status and offer little guidance in this area. So, what can the dentist do?

In the past, the extent of a dentist's nutritional counseling involved advising patients to reduce consumption of sweets and frequency of snacks; however, much more is required today. Dentists must be aware of how nutrition impacts general and oral health and how dental treatment can impact the nutritional status of the patient. Compared with other health care workers, dentists reach a larger number of the general public per year and are in a position to provide clinical and behavioral assessment, information, education, motivation, and follow-up. The dental visit, which is usually longer in duration than the medical visit, affords better opportunities for motivational interventions to enhance self care and health care decisions. Within the community, dentists are strategically positioned to: (1) be advocates for a better

understanding of how oral health and systemic health are related and to be effectively involved in health promotion efforts; (2) offer patients nutritional guidance or refer them to an appropriate nutrition professional; and (3) advocate wellness for patients while improving or maintaining their oral health status. Unfortunately, dental schools and postgraduate continuing education courses are often woefully lacking in the area of nutrition.

The purpose of this issue of the *Dental Clinics of North America* is to review basic nutritional concepts as they apply to overall health and specifically to oral health situations. In addition, practical considerations in the dissemination of this information are outlined by the notable group of distinguished contributing authors. Although this issue does not provide a comprehensive view of all facets of nutrition in oral health, some of the provocative concepts discussed will hopefully motivate oral health care providers to pursue further investigation of these issues. A more thorough understanding of the role of nutrition in oral health may be found in a recently published text edited by Dr. Carole Palmer entitled *Diet and Nutrition in Oral Health* (Prentice Hall). At the very least, this issue should help dentists understand the many ways in which nutrition is weaved into the fabric of oral health concerns.

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