

There isn't
a quick fix
to "Diabetes"

Twin Epidemics

EVERYWHERE WE TURN, newspaper headlines, television news lead-ins and newsmagazine cover stories shout at us about the "twin epidemics" of obesity and diabetes. Using a full arsenal of scare tactics, government agencies spew out dire statistics about the costs of obesity—terms of health care costs, costs of lost productivity at work and cost of life. Implicit in much of the news coverage is that obesity and its related illnesses result from a fundamental character flaw among those who are overweight.

While it's certainly true that both obesity and diabetes are on the rise, the connection between the two is subtler than either the government or the news media would lead us to believe. And coming up with a solution to these "twin epidemics" requires more than finger pointing or shaming those who live with what is now termed "diabesity."

Dr. Francine Kaufman, professor of pediatrics at the University of Southern California, recognizes the complexity of the obesity-diabetes connection and its treatment. The past president of the American Diabetes Association and author of *Diabesity* sees the alarming increase in obesity and diabetes as a call to action and says that the solution involves changes in both personal behavior and public policy.

Kaufman acknowledges that diabesity has both genetic and environmental elements. "We have the genes we have," she says. "Some make it easier to gain weight and to get obesity-related diseases." While we have control over some aspects of our environment, Kaufman says, others are out of our reach. "There are large segments of the population that live in communities, work in workplaces and go to schools where there are not opportunities to make healthy choices and be well." She cites a recent lecture she gave to kids aged seven to nine who had mapped out their Los Angeles neighborhood. "There aren't grocery stores where they live. There is liquor store after liquor store after liquor store. The only place to buy fresh fruit was from a man with a cart on the corner, and who knew where that fruit came from," Kaufman relates.

"They want to eat healthy, they want to be well, but they don't have the opportunity."

Kaufman is committed to creating opportunities so that children can make choices that will lower the rates of obesity and diabetes, and believes that the government has a significant role to play in this endeavor. She was instrumental in convincing the Los Angeles Unified School District to ban sodas from school and to switch the contents of vending machines to healthier choices. "To move this agenda forward, we need to look at legislation at the local level, state level and federal level," she says.

In the meantime, individuals can act to improve their health. Kaufman acknowledges, "There isn't a magic bullet." Instead, she advises patients to make incremental lifestyle changes. "Start to make healthy choices. Reduce soda intake. Start to walk. Do things you can sustain and continue to make improvements." Keeping in mind that the goal is health, Kaufman says, "There's not one thing that works for everybody. I've watched a lot of people make these small steps, and the sum total is that they start to get healthier and usually start to lose weight." In the meantime, Kaufman says she is "re-defining progress for the future." She envisions a society where, "From our health care sector, to our government, to our employers, we're encouraged to make these healthy options." And she'll continue to lead the charge. ♦



Diabesity
In Diabesity: The Obesity-Diabetes Epidemic That Threatens America - And What We Must Do to Stop It (Bantam Books, 2005, \$27),

Dr. Francine Kaufman takes a refreshingly nuanced approach to both topics. Part autobiography, part health education manual and part advocacy blueprint, *Diabesity* avoids the knee-jerk conclusions that often plague similar books. Not only does she outline the complexity of the obesity-diabetes connection in easily understandable language, but she also concludes that the solution to reducing both is multi-pronged, requiring the cooperation of individuals, the health care system and the government. Her narrative draws the reader in, and she makes her points through the stories of her patients. Even if you don't have diabetes, *Diabesity* is an engaging book that will bring you to a deeper understanding of two health issues plaguing America today.



The Cornstarch Connection ● Frances Kaufman, M.D., developed the Extend Bar after she discovered that uncooked cornstarch is a slowly released starch that helps stabilize blood sugar. It's a great choice for diabetics who are concerned about nighttime blood sugar levels.