The Death of Fun

By Jamie Wells, M.D. — October 30, 2017

College campuses are dictating what costumes are offensive. Social media is deluged with healthy Halloween options, like dispensing kale chips instead of the real good stuff. I have tried them, so there will be no convincing me they are better than the more desirable treats. Let’s not even go there with the chocolate covered Brussels sprouts taking over the internet.

Dentists are offering candy swaps as if one day of indulgence translates into exceptionable oral hygiene. Fake News! Besides the fact it is mainly a marketing tool at the core, but I digress.

Does everything need to be sanitized these days? It was enough when the rumors spread years ago about the possibility of turning Sesame Street’s Cookie Monster into Veggie Monster. Is anything sacred? When did this trend of abdicating parenting take hold?

What lessons are there to be learned by stripping away all of the joy of an annual tradition enjoyed by so many? The Debbie Downers are winning and at a misguided cost that will serve no tangible, meaningful end to an obesity epidemic. Virtue signaling is not the prescription to solve such a complex, multi-factorial problem.

Is the goal to raise independent, adaptable, dynamic adults who will thrive and enhance the world? Or, automatons devoid of decision-making capabilities, personal responsibility and free thinking?
What lessons are learned by literally sucking the joy out of Halloween? Otherwise healthy kids—who do not suffer from diabetes or other conditions that warrant dietary restriction—will learn important lessons from the experience. For one, if they overindulge in candy and feel bad from it, they may opt not to repeat the behavior in the future. For those with health issues, there are many wonderful ways to adapt to the tradition so they are still included in the festivities. And others who are opposed to the holiday, in general, can abstain as they would any other year.

It is the purpose of childhood to evolve and garner effective coping skills. We are emphasizing the wrong things when we ignore what behaviors are taking place the other 364 days of the year and showcase this one day of excess. In so doing, we lose sight of how obesity actually works.

By making mistakes is how we, not just children, learn and grow. Growth is not a casualty of life but a necessity to improve and inform our future decisions, learn how to thrive and survive and, most importantly, acquire resilience. This is essential to a life well lived.

The complete absence of risk is not only impossible, but also missing the point of living. Can we please stop overthinking joy? It is as much a part of living as eating, drinking, sleeping and breathing. Life is unpredictable with many challenges, highs and lows. It is as important to mental and physical well-being to experience joy, laughter, be socially connected and look forward to enjoyable times. There is so much pain in the world, limiting joy simply makes no sense. Bringing families and friends together to be goofy, have fun and celebrate ridiculousness pays actual dividends in life and perpetuating good health. The concept is not synonymous with sustained gluttony.

Let’s bring back reasonable living where indulgences on a Halloween reflect an extreme in moderation, nothing more and nothing less. If the sweeping majority of the time the rest of the year we can maintain reduced stress levels, eat well, exercise routinely, get good sleep and be socially connected, then we are on a more optimal path that will best suit (and achieve) our health goals.