

# 3 Steps to a Healthy Family

I love sharing my passion about health and fitness with families. Men, women and children can all benefit from healthy fun, healthy food and a healthy family.

On several occasions I have parents ask, “How do I get my family to take health seriously?” or “How can I change my children’s attitude about healthy food?” Let’s digest these questions separately.

The question about families taking health seriously really needs to be looked at in a couple of ways. Let’s first address the question based on *young people* taking health seriously. Think about it: If you thought you were going to live forever and that health problems were something to consider when you get old—like, say, 30—would you take your health seriously? Of course not! You would eat what you want, anytime you wanted to, without a second thought. You would sit in front of a computer monitor or TV screen without the slightest interest in getting up and going outside. Life is sweet in the recliner seat, with chips and candy on the side.

Adults are no different than youth when it comes to thinking about health. We are over-worked, over-stressed, over-committed and under-valued. Our time off from work finds most of us sitting in front of a computer monitor or TV screen without the slightest interest in getting up and going outside. Life is sweet in the recliner seat, with chips and candy on the side. Sound familiar?

The fact that some adults even consider their health a priority is because it has *suddenly* become a concern. Elevated cholesterol levels, heart disease, diabetes and obesity are striking the “boomer” generation with a mighty force. Emotional and relational concerns are knocking us off our feet and into the psychologist’s chair. Physically we want to be

more desirable to our spouse, more active with our kids and grandkids, or gain back our youthful appearance. And we hold tightly to the thought, “I can’t believe this is happening to me.”

Looking at the previous health question from this viewpoint would suggest the only difference between how a young person views health and a mature person thinks is age. With that in mind, let’s see what can be done. I will answer the second question about young people having a positive attitude toward healthy eating as we go along.

This is going to be fun, but it may not be what you expect. In order to get the attention of our young people, the mindset paradigm about healthy living has to be embraced as a family *lifestyle* change. You can’t expect to change their mind with words. Showing them you’re serious makes all the difference; together you can *“walk the walk!”*

## **1. Healthy Fun**

Physical activity is a great place to start in the race to getting healthy. Ask your kids what they like to do for fun, and try it with them. Or if their current idea of fun doesn’t include sweating, start something new. Many young people love to play DDR, the dance-dance-revolution game. My youngest daughter would take a friend of hers and spend an hour or more trying to match her dance steps with the ones on the screen as she moves her body to the rhythm of the selected music. “Mom, it is the coolest thing. I love it!” Do you get the idea that she is having fun? Mom and Dad can join in the fun with some family competition—anything that gets you moving together.

My youngest, Sammie, has a blast with his dad as they play co-op video games. But there’s not any real physical activity happening there, unless you count their bodies moving up and down on the couch as they yell, “Not fair! He so didn’t get me!” So after about 30 minutes of couch time, Sammie hits the

great outdoors for some R&R with the dogs, racing around the yard, making noise and just plain having fun.

As a family we like variety in our physical activity, so “change up” is the name of the game. Soccer, basketball and Frisbee are great examples—anything to get our bodies moving. Walking is a great way to start if you are not doing anything now. The key is finding something your young people like to do and then doing it with them. You may be surprised how much you enjoy yourself.

Sammie’s recreation of choice is golf, and he walks the course, so 18 holes over four hours is not too bad for endurance, but it won’t cut the mustard if you’re looking for a cardio workout. You need to elevate the heart a bit more. Embrace being physically active for 30 minutes a day most days of the week, and it will change the future health of your entire family.

## **2. Healthy Food**

When someone thinks of a healthy diet, the first thought is bad-tasting food; second, it’s a diet, so it must be a temporary change; and, finally, it has to be expensive. Wrong on all three counts. Good nutrition goes hand in hand with physical activity, and the best way to continue the race toward healthy living is to *start making positive eating choices as a family*.

The easy way to know if you’re serving a balanced meal is to look for a variety of color on your plate. This would include a couple of veggies; a lean meat, fish, or chicken; whole grain bread or pasta; fruit; and for one meal a week, add a moderate dessert—low calorie but tasty.

In judging portion size, just look at the palm of your hand. What ever fits in it is one portion. You can make this fun with the kids. Let them serve themselves. See how close they come to choosing a “proper portion.” Then explain they need to

have different colors on their plate as well. No matter how old you are, these are two balancing tools everyone can use.

### 3. Healthy Family

The concept of healthy living has to become a 24/7, 365-day-a-year thought process to become a habit. Sadly, as I stated earlier, most people only think about getting healthy when it becomes a concern. As adults, it's our responsibility to lead by example. It's not the school's or the church's responsibility to teach healthy habits. Kids learn by what they live.

So when it comes to encouraging a healthy lifestyle in every area of living, remember "someone" is watching every move we make and we are setting the standard with every bite we take. If you smoke, stop. And limit or eliminate alcohol intake. Start expecting a higher level of accountability from your children, and you will get it. Let them know how important good health is to you, and they will embrace it.

Face it: A healthy family is a happy family. So get out there and have fun. Join a gym, sign your child up for sports or take karate as a family. Don't just think about being healthy—get out there and kick up some dirt.

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