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Family Matters for Health

The definition of “the family” these days extends well beyond what traditionally was described as the “nuclear family.” But here’s something that remains true about families: When it comes to your health, your family matters. Much of what you do as a family – from eating meals to setting household rules to choosing recreation activities – has an impact on your physical and emotional health. These articles have healthy suggestions for you and your family.

Family Fitness

In past years, generations of school children have impatiently anticipated outdoor recess and after school fun. But today, nature, with all her adventures, must compete with television, video games and the Internet for our children's attention. This change in childhood activities is affecting our nation's health. Just look at these statistics:

- 50% of adults and nearly 25% of children are overweight.
- Between 50% and 70% of overweight children will grow up to become overweight adults.
- Obesity is now considered nearly as serious a threat to Americans' health as smoking.
- Severe obesity among children has almost doubled in the past 20 years.
- Only 30% of childhood obesity comes from overeating, while 50% is due to lack of exercise.
- 66% of school-age children don't meet recommended minimum standards for aerobic fitness, muscular strength and endurance.

Clearly it's time to find ways for parents to counter our kids' sedentary lifestyles. Here are some ways to give your child a healthy dose of physical activity.

EXERCISE TOGETHER

Successfully improving a child's exercise habits usually means the whole family must make changes together. Scheduling family fun time on weekends, after work, or after school is an ideal opportunity for injecting regular doses of physical activity into children's lives. Basketball and Frisbee can take the place of board games and movies, and choosing something the kids like, even if it isn't necessarily a parental favorite, keeps their interest level high.

MAKE EXERCISE FUN

Regular exercise will become a healthy habit only when it's fun as well as rewarding. Don't get in the way of your child's enjoyment by insisting he or she performs up to a certain standard. Children will ask for instruction when they want to know how to do something better, and they'll let you know just how much coaching they want. Focus on having fun and don't let parental lectures or pressures become a deterrent.

ORGANIZE SPORTS PARTIES

Invite your children's friends to join the fun. Organize get-togethers that include skating, swimming, bowling or hiking. It's a great way to celebrate a birthday and there's no need to limit games to once a year. When your child has friends over on a weekend, don't automatically head to the video store to rent movies. Instead, provide skates, kites and a ride to the park. If you meet with resistance, add a video camera to the mix and let them film each other clowning around or showing off - it's a temptation few kids can resist!

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Organized sports teams are a natural choice for introducing healthy exercise into your child's life. But some kids are just not cut out for team sports, either because they're intimidated by the competition or because they don't have the skills to feel successful in a team. Rather than battling it out with your child before every practice and game, explore alternatives to competitive sports that may prove more fun and exciting.

Just remember that there are easy ways to make exercise an enjoyable part of your family's life. And you can feel good about doing it because you'll be strengthening family ties too!

As your EAP, we at MHN are working to provide you with the information you need to achieve optimal health and wellness. You can call us 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and as always, all calls are confidential.

Communicating Effectively With Your Children

Communication is a two-way bridge that connects you to your child's feelings. Healthy communication between parents and their children helps youngsters develop positive personalities and good relationships with other people.

Healthy communication builds your children's self-esteem because it makes them feel cared for and loved. With caring parents to listen to their concerns, children feel safe and able to express their feelings and needs directly in words. Children who are nurtured with their parents' attention learn how to manage their feelings without overreacting.

A strong bond with your children also helps you feel close to them and understand their needs. Understanding your children in this way gives you the tools to help them grow and manage the inevitable frustrations of being a parent.

BUILD THE BRIDGE OF COMMUNICATION

- ***Be available.***
Children need to feel that their parents are available to them. Even spending 10 minutes a day with each child makes the bridge of communication stronger. Get yourself into a quiet, attentive mood before you start listening to your child or talking about something important.
- ***Be a good listener.***
Children believe they're important when they feel their parents understand them. Being a good listener helps children feel loved, even when they're upset and you can't do anything to fix the problem. Ask your child to tell you his ideas and feelings. Try to understand exactly what your child is saying. What your child is trying to tell you is important to him, even when it may not be to you.
- ***Show empathy.***
You can show empathy even if you disagree with your child. Let your child know you've heard and appreciate her feelings. Showing empathy means making sure you understand what your child is feeling. Restate what your child has expressed and ask if your understanding of her feelings is correct.
- ***Be a good sender.***
Your child will be in a better mood to listen to you if he feels heard and cared for. Make sure that what you say, your tone of voice and what you do send a consistent message. For instance, if you laugh when you say "no," your child will be confused about what you really want.

Be very specific about what you want your child to do. Use words to send messages, even with toddlers. Use feeling words when you praise your child's behavior. For example, you can say "I'm so happy" when your child puts his dirty clothes in the hamper. Encourage your child to praise himself as well.

Use "I" statements to tell your child what makes you unhappy about her behavior. It's better to say: "I was worried when you came home late from Jessica's house" than to yell "Why were you late for dinner again?" Tell your child what you feel and think, not what she should think or feel.

- ***Be a good role model.***
Young children learn by copying their parents' behavior. If you use a lot of feeling words, it will help your child learn to do the same. Verbalizing feelings also helps children learn to control their behavior.

Menu Planning Made Simple

You'll save time and provide more nutritious meals for your family when you plan meals a week in advance. Use this guide to help plan for your weekly shopping and menus.

A HEALTHY DAILY DIET FOR AN ADULT INCLUDES:

Breakfast

- one serving of Vitamin C fruit (oranges, grapefruit, cantaloupe)
- high-fiber cereal

- whole-grain toast
- skim milk

Lunch

- 3 ounces of meat or legumes
- two servings of starch (bread)
- one serving of vegetable or fruit
- skim milk

Dinner

- 3 ounces of meat or legumes
- two servings of starch (potato, pasta, bread, etc.)
- one serving of vegetable
- fruit or light dessert
- skim milk

DINNER IN ADVANCE

These freezable dinners will meet adult daily requirements for protein. Cook double quantities to allow for lunch-time leftovers:

- spaghetti
- chili
- vegetarian casseroles
- stew without potatoes (Potatoes don't freeze well unless they're mashed or blended with other ingredients.)
- hamburger dishes
- legumes

SALADS WITH A SHELF LIFE

Serve salads to meet your family's daily needs for vegetables. Lettuce may wilt, but these salads can last in your refrigerator for up to four days:

- tomato, cooked green beans and onions in dressing
- cooked corn, peas with onion, celery and dressing
- macaroni salad
- potato salad
- raw zucchini, onion, cooked pasta, red cabbage and dressing
- cooked chicken, celery, pineapple chunks, nuts and sour cream

A WEEK OF SANDWICHES

Sandwiches satisfy your dietary requirement for starch. Depending on the filling, they can also add to your daily protein intake. You can save time by fixing and freezing sandwiches for an entire week. Remove the sandwiches from the freezer each morning, and they'll be defrosted by lunch time.

You'll need a variety of bread, including pita bread, onion or french rolls and hamburger buns, and freezable fillings, such as:

- peanut butter
- lunch meats (low-fat ham, chicken and turkey breast, bologna and lean roast beef)
- leftover chicken or turkey
- tuna made with low-fat or nonfat sour cream or salad dressing

FREEZING

- Store each sandwich in its own plastic bag.
- Label and date each sandwich.
- Put all of the wrapped sandwiches in one large airtight bag to preserve them longer.

TRY THESE CONDIMENTS FOR VARIETY:

- jam
- relish
- barbecue sauce
- chutney
- sweet and sour sauce
- mustard
- ketchup
- honey
- sour cream
- horseradish sauce
- salad dressing
- cranberry sauce
- teriyaki sauce

Make Time for Fun and Relaxation

A sense of play and the ability to relax are second nature to some people. These folks don't need to be reminded of how good it feels to whack a tennis ball over a net or help their kids build a model railroad. For others, it helps to be reminded that play and relaxation have a purpose.

WHY YOU NEED LEISURE

- In addition to providing satisfaction in itself, as little as an hour a day of leisure time helps you stay in balance.
- Physical fun in the form of aerobic activity helps dissolve the tension that accumulates in your body during stressful times.
- When you add more leisure to your life, you'll become a healthier and more effective employee and parent.

HOW TO HAVE FUN

Have you forgotten how to have fun? If so, don't lose hope. Play is serious business for kids, so take some cues from your children. Healthy, happy kids invest their entire heart and soul in their play activities. They approach their physical games and flights of imagination with a kind of abandon most adults have forgotten is possible.

- When it's your turn to play, choose some activities that are just for you. You can do other activities as a family.
- If you need to schedule leisure time activities into your busy day, do so.
- Pick sports, hobbies and outings that give you and your family a sense of enrichment of simply make everyone feel good.
- Remember to allow time for unexpected pleasures.
- Reserve quiet times at the beginning or end of the day to meditate or relax with a favorite quiet activity, such as reading or crafts.

DEVOTE YOURSELF TO FUN

Once you've chosen an activity, put your whole heart and mind into it. If you have trouble letting go of worries and responsibilities, imagine that you've sealed your cares in a carton and stashed it under your desk for a few hours. The box will be there whenever you need to retrieve it. Here are some ideas for having fun:

PERSONAL RECREATION

- Pursue a new hobby or revive a former one.
- Establish and maintain a regular exercise program
- Learn a new sport. Consider racquetball, cycling, jogging, boating or dancing.
- Join a book discussion group.
- Seek a creative outlet in crafts, music or art.
- Join a community group.
- Enroll in a class.
- Call someone you haven't talked to in a long time.
- Go for a walk in a new part of town.
- Visit an antique shop.

FAMILY FUN

- Attend a sports or entertainment event together.
- Take your children to a special movie or amusement center.
- Go on cycling trips.
- Visit the zoo.
- Fly a kite.
- Take day trips to the country.
- Take walks around the neighborhood or to the park or library.
- Play charades and board games instead of watching television.
- Visit science and art museums.
- Make planning your vacation a family activity. Encourage your children to read travel brochures and library books about your destination. Discuss your trip and some of the sights you'll see.
- Participate in bike-a-thons, walk-a-thons and other fund raisers.
- Try family folk dancing and square dancing.

Also in this issue:



Don't Go Blaming Yourself

People with depression quite often blame themselves when things go wrong, but rarely give themselves credit when things go right. For example, when something goes badly, you may think it is your fault and when things go right, you think that it was 'just luck'.

TRY THIS EXERCISE:

- Think of an event or situation that you enjoyed or coped well in.
- Draw a table with two columns. Label one of the columns 'Due to Me' and one 'Due to Others'.
- Fill in the table; perhaps ask a friend to help.
- At the end, write down on a scale of 1 to 10. how much you were responsible for this event or situation.
- Do the same for other events and situations, including ones that went badly.

If you find that you are blaming yourself for bad things that happen and giving other people the credit for when good things happen, you need to look again at your table. Can you think of other reasons why things might have happened? It might help to think of something helpful or supportive you would say to someone else if something did not go well.

The idea is to learn to attribute the good things that happen to you to general and stable things about yourself e.g. your skills or personality. Bad things that happen are often due to things outside of our control but which are only temporary.



The Art of Eating Smart

TEST YOUR FOOD SAVVY

Take this quick test to see how much you know about healthy eating.

1. (T or F) Your body burns calories even when you are not moving.
2. (T or F) Eating healthy is a matter of choosing foods from four basic food groups.
3. (T or F) To eat healthy, you should eat an equal portion of carbohydrates, proteins and fats.
4. (T or F) To eat healthy, all you have to do is watch your calories and reduce your intake of sugars, fats and salts.
5. (T or F) If a food label says it is 100 calories and 95 percent fat free, it means that only 5 percent of its calories come from fat.
6. (T or F) As long as you exercise regularly, you can eat virtually anything you want.
7. (T or F) Snacking between meals is bad for you.
8. (T or F) Polyunsaturated fats have just as many calories as saturated fats.
9. (T or F) Pastas, rice and breads are fattening.
10. (T or F) Ground turkey is good for you because it is high in protein and low in fat.

Scroll down to see how you scored.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO DIET TO EAT SMART

What does the word *diet* mean to you? Many people think that dieting only refers to losing weight; but your diet actually refers to what you eat. Everybody has a diet, but some diets are healthier than others. People with poor diets tend to feel tired, weak or may even gain too much weight.

Diet plans come and go, but eating healthy is one habit that will never go out of style. The trouble is that most people don't know how to eat healthy. Some people think eating healthy means eating boring or bland foods, or portions so small that they're gone in two bites!

But supermarkets are full of a wonderful variety of foods, and just because it tastes good doesn't mean it's bad for you. The secret lies in eating foods that give you more of the nutrients you need, and fewer things (like fat, salt and sugar) you don't want. And it means unlearning some of our old food habits.

A PLACE TO BEGIN: THE FOOD PYRAMID

Many of us learned that there were four food groups, and that all four were essential to good health. But studies have shown that this old model is not the best one for healthy eating.* The new food pyramid is a guide to a healthier and more nutritious diet.

*Studies show that Americans may be eating too much animal protein, and should be eating more grains and vegetables instead.

HOW TO READ THE NEW FOOD PYRAMID

6-11 servings of bread, cereal, rice or pasta

The food pyramid shows us that a healthy diet starts with a good, solid base of foods from this important group. These complex carbohydrates provide your body with the energy you need each day, along with several nutrients. Though 6-11 servings may sound like a lot, keep in mind that standard serving sizes are smaller than you might think. For example, a single slice of bread is considered one serving. So if you ate a sandwich, you'd already have two servings of bread. Read labels if you are not sure how big a serving is.

3-5 servings of vegetables and 2-4 servings of fruit

Adding to that foundation, you can eat healthy amounts of fruits and vegetables, which come in a variety of forms. Though fresh is usually best for maximum nutrition, you can also get these in the form of juices or frozen and canned goods. Best of all, foods from this group make terrific snacks and the seasonal variety is always changing.

2-3 servings of milk, yogurt or cheese, and 2-3 servings of meat, poultry, fish, dry beans or nuts

Unlike the old model, the food pyramid places less emphasis on animal products. Many of these foods are high in protein and fat. Having these foods as side dishes or supplements to the other groups is healthier for you.

Fats, oils and sweets used only sparingly

Though the various forms of fats and sugars add flavor and texture to make foods more enjoyable, you can have too much of a good thing. These are known to be harmful to your body if you eat too much, too often. And these food products often sneak unnoticed into other foods as hidden dangers. One rule of thumb: if it's greasy, oily, creamy or fried, think twice before you bite.

VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE

Each food group provides your body with some nutritional benefit - for good health you need them all. But it is also important to get the right balance of these food groups, and choose foods within each group that are low in fat, sugar and salt, and high in fiber, complex carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals.

Try new foods, and cook up your favorites in new and different ways. If you eat a variety each day, you'll discover endless possibilities for delicious meals and snacks - and they're good for you too.

SNACKING WITHOUT GUILT

Eating healthy also means being realistic about snacking and enjoying your other favorite foods. If you crave a certain food, remember the 80 / 20 rule: as long as you eat healthy 80 percent of the time, you can sample those "forbidden" foods 20 percent of the time, guilt-free.

Many food manufactures now make healthier versions of their products. Though you should still try to limit your snacking, you can think of snacks as a mini-meal. Three balanced meals and three mini-meals will provide you with the energy you need all day.

GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT

Finally, remember that you don't need a calculator at every meal to figure out what's healthy. Just remember that for good health, you need to balance eating, exercise and feeling satisfied when you eat. As a general guideline, aim for the following balance each day. If one meal falls short in one area, make up for it at your next meal.

Type of Food	Percent of Daily Calories
Carbohydrates	60-65 percent
Proteins	12-15 percent
Fats	Less than 25 percent

HOW MANY CALORIES DO I NEED PER DAY?

The answer to this question is different for everyone; it depends on how tall you are, how much you weigh, whether you would like to lose, gain, or maintain weight, etc. Check with your doctor to be sure. For a general guideline, use 1,500 to 2,000 calories per day for women; 2,000 to 2,500 for men. Active people may need more calories.

ANSWERS TO QUIZ

1. **True:** Even sleeping, your body is at work repairing cells, pumping blood and providing oxygen to all its parts. Food is stored as energy to help make those functions work. But an excess of food is stored as fat, and exercise can help burn those extra calories.
2. **False:** Contrary to what you may have been taught, the four food groups may not be the healthiest model for eating. For a better model, study the food pyramid.
3. **False:** You do not need an equal portion of these nutrients. Rather, you need primarily carbohydrates along with a smaller amount of protein and fat.
4. **False:** There's more to eating healthy than avoiding what's bad for you. Healthy eating habits come from choosing the foods that are good for you too, like fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
5. **False:** The 95 percent refers to the product by weight, not calories. To convert grams of fat to calories from fat, multiply grams of fat by 9 (since 1 gram of fat = 9 calories).
6. **False:** Though a regular exercise program can certainly help you keep yourself in good condition, all your efforts to stay healthy won't work if you eat the wrong kinds of foods. No matter what your shape, eating healthy is good for everybody.
7. **False:** Snacking on healthy foods, like fruits and vegetables or whole breads, can actually help you. If you eat small meals balanced over a day, your body will process them more efficiently than if you gorged yourself at one meal and starved the rest of the day.
8. **True:** Whether a fat is polyunsaturated or saturated, it still contains 9 calories per gram.
9. **False:** These starches are actually complex carbohydrates and good for you - it's the sauces and the butter you put on them that can make them unhealthy.

10. **False:** Although highly touted as a health food, and indeed high in protein, ground turkey is also equally high in fat. Don't be misled into thinking that so-called health foods are always healthier for you. Read the labels to be sure. Ground skinless 100 percent breast meat (chicken or turkey) is truly low fat.



The Toughest Transition: Leaving Your Child to Return to Work

Your parental leave is drawing to a close. As you get ready to trade your infant's coos for the steady hum of the workplace, you'll probably notice lots of questions, fears and emotions starting to surface. You can make your transition from home to work much easier if you consider the changes that lie ahead.

BE PREPARED FOR STRONG FEELINGS

Before you pack your briefcase and prepare your work wardrobe, ready yourself for the emotional impact of leaving your baby. Most parents experience doubt, guilt and grief as they re-enter the workplace. Admit these feelings to yourself and talk them over with your spouse. Seek out people who understand you and your situation, such as other parents and family members.

UNDERSTAND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SEPARATION

Separation is easier for babies younger than 6 months. That's the age an infant becomes more firmly attached to the parents and will protest being left with anyone else. Your child will protest when you leave -- this is necessary and healthy. But it's also important that she develop a strong, caring relationship with a trusted caregiver. Children in day care may develop less intense emotional reactions. When you come into view, your baby may turn away, as if to gather her emotions. These intense reactions are necessary precursors to a passionate reunion with you.

SHIFT GEARS GRADUALLY

If you've hired an in-home caregiver, arrange for the person to spend time with you and your baby before you return to work. Begin with one or two hours during which you demonstrate your method of feeding, diapering and putting your baby to sleep. Next, have the caregiver come for half a day while you leave the house for part of that time. When you finally do return to work, try to ease yourself back into a schedule by working half-days or at home part of the day. If you've chosen a day care center, spend time with your infant at the location, getting to know the people and routines.

ADJUSTMENT HAPPENS OVER TIME

A few other ideas can make leaving easier. It helps to remember that in the hands of a trusted, competent child care provider, your child may have positive experiences with other children she might not have had staying home alone with you. Also, as a working parent, you're helping your child learn to adapt to change and develop the confidence that she can overcome her fears and frustrations.



Communicating with Your Childcare Provider

Close, trusting relationships with your child's care providers will help you feel more relaxed and assured while you're on the job.

If you've recently hired an in-home provider, arrange for the person to spend time with you and your child before you return to work. Take some time to get to know each other and discuss how you'll keep in touch during the day. Many parents pick a time when they call from work to check in with the caregiver or to receive a call from their child.

If your children attend a day care center, find out if the staff has special routines or schedules for checking in with parents. While it's important to respect the routines of your day care center, never enroll your child in a day care center where you're not welcome to drop in unannounced.

Many professional caregivers look forward to a brief chat when a parent drops off or picks up their child. This is a good time to explain that your child had a difficult time sleeping the night before or to learn what kind of day your child had. If one parent is responsible for dropping off and picking up the child, the other parent should occasionally do so in order to get to know the caregiver. During these talks, avoid making negative statements about your child in front of him or her.

Day care staff members have many obligations. If you repeatedly stay for extended periods of time when you pick up or drop off your child, you may be preventing the caregiver from watching the other children. Instead, for longer discussions, arrange in advance for a time when you can talk away from your child and be uninterrupted by distractions. Set up a meeting with the day care teacher or suggest having dinner out with the caregiver. This will allow you to discuss issues, such as behavior problems, or to resolve conflicts as they arise.