

Raising Children to be Vibrantly Healthy 13 Simple Tips that WORK

By Susan Smith Jones, PhD

Throughout this article, Susan recommends some of her favorite nutritional supplements by Michael's® Naturopathic Programs.

Hardening of the attitudes is something that many adults succumb to. Yet, the children in our lives teach us the importance of relinquishing our rigid outlooks and posturing. Being around young children is one of my favorite pastimes and enriches my life in so many ways; their approach to life is a gentle reminder to me that life is to be celebrated and enjoyed. But it's difficult to enjoy oneself when the child is unhealthy — as so many children are these days.

When a child is born, a dream is born. What happens as the child grows up to fulfill that dream is dependent upon how the parent nurtures and nourishes that child. Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote: *"Health is our greatest wealth."* That is certainly true for children, as well as teens and adults. While every child is different, I believe there are certain things that parents can do to expose their children to a healthier lifestyle.

Healthy foods and physical activity ride in tandem as essential components to raising healthy children. Parents can easily become overwhelmed with information overload about food choices or overwhelmed with jobs, commuting, and stress-filled lifestyles. Although we as parents understand that good nutrition is important for our children, many children in real life eat a diet high in sugar and fat, low in calcium, and low in fresh fruits and vegetables. How our children eat has a great deal to do with what they learn from the people around them. Similarly, children often duplicate the physical activity level of their parents. These messages are received in subtle and not-so-subtle ways.

A Balancing Act

Feeding children becomes a balancing act, and in many homes may turn into a battle zone. The more you force, the less they eat. Battle zones create stress and conflict at the dinner table. But somehow we must get the message across to them about healthy eating and living.

Eating preferences are established by the age of 3. It is a matter of what you do with them at a very young age. The younger your child is when you start this philosophy of healthy eating and living, the easier it will be later on. But whatever the age, it is better to start now rather than later. So what can parents do now to help make a positive, healthy difference in the lives of their children? Here are 13 tips that I've used for 35 years as a holistic lifestyle coach and health consultant.

1. Look at yourself first. It's essential for you as the parent or caretaker to make the necessary changes in your life since children learn best by example. You can't expect your children to eat more fruits and vegetables if you never eat them or rarely extol their virtues. Be a shining example to your children.

2. Variety is the spice of life. Always have a variety of colorful fruits and veggies on hand and let the kids help with the selection of produce in the market and the preparation of food at home. Studies show that the children that help create the fresh food meals are most apt to eat the food once prepared. This goes for school lunches, too. Let your child help you create a power lunch to take to school. Baby veggies and easy fruit, such as delicious satsuma tangerines or fresh berries, are easy to eat in a hurry (for a snack) and provide quick energy.

3. Take a fruit break. Every day have your child take a fruit break. Fresh fruit — such as apples, oranges, berries, bananas, grapes, kiwi, tangerines, and pears — contain a plethora of nutrients, including enzymes, vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and fiber. This high-water content food is sorely missing in the diet of most children who need at least three different fruits daily. If children take one fruit break during the day and add that to the fruit they'll have with breakfast and lunch, they'll be well on the way to enhancing their health and fortifying their bodies. In addition, take a daily veggie break -- such as cut-up bell peppers, baby carrots, celery sticks with nut butters in them, cherry tomatoes, string beans, or baby squash. Serve this with healthy dips. Strive for 7 servings of vegetables. That's not hard to do when you have colorful salads and soups. Find ways to make these healthy food breaks fun and rewarding.

4. Keep your home a junk food-free zone. The saying, "out of sight, out of mind" is certainly true when it comes to junk foods. Keep highly processed, refined foods to the bare minimum at home. Let your child choose from a variety of fresh, whole foods rather than always deciding for them what they should be eating. In other words, give them back the power to choose but make sure you offer them a variety of healthy foods from which to select.

5. Give children high quality nutritional supplements. The nutritional needs of a growing child are of considerable importance, especially during their early years. With kids who are fussy eaters, many of their basic nutritional needs can get overlooked. The nutritional supplements I recommend for children are **MICHAEL'S® Children's Chewables** (www.michaelshealth.com). They are free of any artificial sweeteners, colorings, and flavorings and do not contain added fructose, glucose, or high fructose corn syrup. With a natural and delicious flavor, this formula includes Vitamins A, B, C, D, and E; Zinc, Iodine and Chromium; Calcium, Vitamin K, Magnesium, and Manganese; and so much more. For children 1-3 years of age, chew one (1) tablet daily with breakfast. For children 4-8 years of age, chew two (2) tablets daily with breakfast. For children age 9 and older, **MICHAEL'S® Pre-Teen & Teen Multi Vitamins** are available.

6. Break the food seduction. Processed foods — those high in sugar, white flour, salt, preservatives, and additives — are very addicting. The more they're eaten, the more they're craved. That goes for children, teens, and adults. It's best to begin each meal with a nutrient-dense, high fiber food so children receive nutrients before consuming any empty calorie foods (those with high calories and little to no nutritional value).

7. Make quality sleep and plenty of water priorities. Lack of sleep and pure water exacerbates the craving for processed foods. Establish a nightly sleep routine, encourage ample water drinking, and offer a variety of whole foods. Feeling tired and cranky, lacking energy, or becoming moody is often a sign of dehydration and/or lack of sleep. Sleep, water, and the consumption of a variety of colorful, healthy foods needs to be a non-negotiable daily ritual.

8. Be prepared. Graze throughout the day on whole foods. This goes for children and adults. When the blood sugar level drops too low, you'll crave eating anything that's quick and often devoid of nutrients. Keep plastic storage bags on hand filled with healthy foods so you and the kids don't become famished. Being very hungry distorts common sense.

9. Make the family dinner table sacred. Barring any emergency, strive to have dinner together as a family and don't use this time to discuss problems. Stressful meals impede digestion, suppress the immune system, and stifle joy and serenity. Mealtime should nourish body and soul.

10. Join the breakfast club. Children need a healthy breakfast to start the day. “Breakfast” means “breaking the fast.” If you feel rushed in the mornings, get organized the night before with, perhaps, setting the breakfast table, making the lunches, laying out clothes, and organizing the breakfast meal. The first 40 minutes of each day sets the tone for the day. So make your first 40 minutes with your family filled with organization, healthy foods, and fun.

11. Exercise as a family. Get involved with your children’s favorite physical activities. Play basketball or soccer with them. Swim together, jog on the beach, hike the trails, or bike around the block. A family that exercises together, stays healthy together and closely connected.

12. Reward healthy choices. Find ways to reward your child when he or she makes choices to be more active physically — rewards such as extra quality time with you, with friends, a trip to the library or a movie, or, perhaps, a minute of TV time for every minute of exercise.

13. Encourage creative exercise. Invite your children to find ways to be more physically active — such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator, parking at the end of a parking lot when shopping, skipping together in the local park or beach before or after the family picnic, or exercising when watching television.

In conclusion, Pythagoras gave us this sage advice almost 2500 years ago and it’s efficacious for children, teens, and adults alike. *“Choose what is best; habit will soon render it agreeable and easy.”* Know that all the healthy choices we make add up. We are what we eat, how we exercise, and what we think. Happy children are healthy children and healthy children are happy children. Choose to make health a top priority by being pro-active. Let’s love and protect our children and teach them how to live healthfully; they are our future and they’re worth it!

Susan Smith Jones, PhD: For a woman with three of America’s most ordinary names, Susan Smith Jones, MS, PhD, has certainly made extraordinary contributions to the fields of holistic health, anti-aging, and human potential. For starters, she taught students, staff and faculty how to be healthy and fit for 30 years at UCLA. Susan has established herself as one of the world’s foremost experts on diet and nutrition, high-level wellness, natural remedies and balanced living. She is the author of 27 books (including ***Walking on Air***, ***The Joy Factor*** and ***Recipes for Health Bliss***) and over 2,000 magazine articles on these topics, and has been a guest on more than 2,500 radio and TV shows. Susan teaches that the body is designed to be self-repairing, self-renewing, and self-sustaining and that the power to live a radiantly healthy life is within everyone’s grasp. For more information on Susan, please visit: www.SusanSmithJones.com



