

The Importance of a Strong Family Life

Claire, Amy, Winston, and Clint Nabors enjoy riding their bikes together outside

From working out to finding time to laugh together, local families and doctors share their tips for raising all-around healthy kids

Written by Lorrie Crow



Photo by April Pizana Photography

Changing your habits and becoming a healthy family can sound painful and overwhelming. Attaining that vision of health is often associated with a lot of don'ts, which can make any family shy away from a goal of being fit. But even simple changes and taking the time to enjoy your family can make a big difference in raising an all-around healthy child. These simple tips below from local families and doctors make the goal of becoming a healthy family much less agonizing – and maybe even a little fun!

Work out as a Family

It might be the most obvious way to become healthy, but working out together is also a fantastic way to bond as a family. By honoring a commitment, you're also teaching your children responsibility, while staying fit. "It's not whether or not you need to lose weight; exercise is good for everyone," says Dr. Stacey Gallas of Texas Children's Pediatric Associates, who has two boys and a girl, ages 5, 9, and 11. She adds that when kids see their parents exercise, they will also be motivated. "Taking even just a 15-minute family walk or bike ride is good for family bonding and for becoming healthy," she explains.

Manage Stress Better

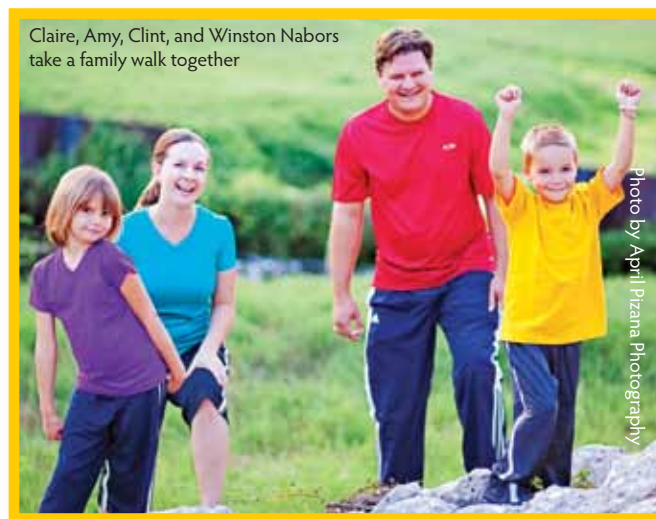
Life gets overwhelming, and when parents are stressed, children pick up on it. Stephanie Smith, mother of 3-year-old twin girls and a 1-year-old son, is definitely a mom who has experienced times of tension. Taking a bath is one way she de-stresses, but she also tries to "escape within reason."

Relieving stress in simple ways helps set the example for your child, and it helps you manage hectic family days. "I like to attend my Multiples of Moms meetings, go on date nights with my husband, and also take just one child to run a fun errand – this helps with one-on-one bonding," Smith says. Her number one rule for herself is to do the best she can and let the rest go. "Don't expect to get it all done," she advises.

Smith is keenly aware of what can happen when you let stress get the upper hand. "If you don't take steps to relieve some of your stresses, then you yourself could have one of your own meltdowns," she explains. "You will make wrong food choices and will have physical reactions, such as anxiety. Plus, your children will be aware of your stress, and that adds to the cycle."

Eat a Healthy Diet

Teresa Gibson admits she and her husband Tom and their 14-year-old daughter Christina have not always been a healthy family. "We were eating out almost all the time," she shares. "It didn't matter what food it was." Teresa says their bad eating habits were caused by her not being interested in cooking and the convenience of eating out with a busy schedule.



Claire, Amy, Clint, and Winston Nabors take a family walk together

Photo by April Pizana Photography

The family's turnaround came when her husband's doctor told him his high cholesterol and recent weight gain, along with a family history of heart ailments were going to catch up with him. The family started their healthy habits by trying to skip fast food.

Then, Teresa took an online webinar class on healthy eating habits and says that's when her whole thought process changed. "We ate more frequent, smaller-portioned meals and took supplements that helped support our health," she says. The result is that she and her husband are off all of their medications, and their daughter is off almost all of her allergy medications.

Although they've had a couple of lapses, due to their hectic, busy lives, the Gibson family strives to make healthy living a way of life. "All three of us are dedicated to healthy choices," says Teresa.

Although they've had a couple of lapses, due to their hectic, busy lives, the Gibson family strives to make healthy living a way of life. "All three of us are dedicated to healthy choices," says Teresa.

Share Life Experiences Together

Whether it's taking a trip to Disney World or just spending the day together at a local museum, family experiences that happen together can make a huge impression on a child. From both a medical and a mommy viewpoint, Dr. Gallas says it is very important to make these memories and set time aside for family, especially in a technology-driven age where everyone is often focused on doing their own thing. "We do a lot together as a family," she says. "We bike, we go to family-type events, and we try to include family in our activities."

TIP
"Parents can help prevent childhood obesity by portion control, avoiding fast food, and keeping kids active. Lead by example."
- Stacey Gallas, MD



Eat Healthy



Laugh Together



Share Life Experiences



Love Unconditionally

Love Unconditionally

Smith's pediatrician told her that the number one important self-esteem builder is to show your kids unconditional love. Her doctor says that generally, kids who grow up in a home with lots of love have good self-esteem, and it is important to keep a home filled with lots of praise. "My doctor also advises her patients to really listen to what your child is saying, like how they did at school and what they learned. [Also,] explain why you are telling them no, [instead of] just saying, 'Because I said no,'" Smith says.

Dr. Gallas encourages parents to find out where your child's talent lies so he or she can gain confidence in that area. "It's also good for kids to be true to themselves," she says. "Other people will like them better, because they are not trying to be something they are not."

Laugh Together

Sometimes, the best things in life are the simplest, like laughing until you cry. Find any excuse to laugh together: Play games, tell jokes, or just act plain goofy. "Play hide and seek – what kid doesn't love this?" says Smith, who also is a big fan of tickle time with her kids. Playing with bubbles also makes her kids laugh, along with those times when she just acts super silly. She adds, "That's a no-brainer, because they are getting 'fun Mommy!'" KM

LORRIE CROW has been eating a lot of fruit and vegetables lately. She also plays hide and seek with her baby grandson Braden, who laughs at her silly faces.



Give Your Kids Chores and Responsibilities

Here are a few age-appropriate tasks parents can introduce in their child's daily routine to encourage responsibility.

- AGE 1** Pick up their toys when they're finished playing.
- AGE 2** Put their dirty clothes in the hamper and their shoes in the shoe basket.
- AGE 3** Set the table at mealtime and feed the pet every day.
- AGE 4** Pick out outfits and put on clothes themselves.
- AGE 5** Teach your children how to make their bed.