


A decorative border of stylized, dark brown floral and vine motifs surrounds the central text. The motifs include leaves, small flowers, and swirling vines, creating a classic, ornate frame.

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THOUGHTS ON A BALANCED LIFESTYLE

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In this day and age, we are so bombarded with differing research on how to lead healthy lifestyles that more often than not the information ends up confusing us more. So how do we keep it simple, and what are the things that we really do need to remember? A healthy diet and exercise are a good place to start.

Healthy Eating as a Family

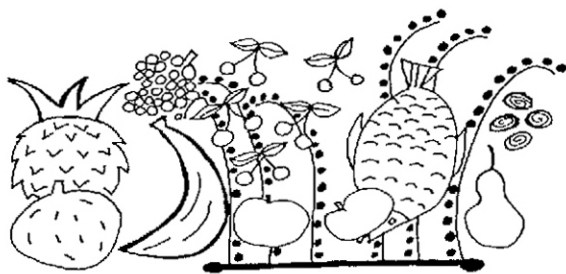
The worst approach is to try to make all the recommended changes overnight. Rather, the slow and steady approach – making small, incremental improvements – serves best. Here are tips to help you move more easily toward a heart-healthy diet:

- ❖ **Watch your caloric and fat intake.** Remember that for a woman, the daily caloric intake should NOT exceed 2,000 calories and 65 grams of fat, whereas for men it is 2,500 calories and 80 grams of fat. Decrease the amount of calories you're eating until you're consuming fewer than you burn. Extra weight makes your heart work harder and causes extra stress. Note! In general, if you want to know how many calories (per day) your child needs, a good rule of thumb for children up to five years of age is to begin with a base of 1,000 calories and add 100 calories for each year of your child's age. A one-year-old would need approximately 1,000 + 100 calories for one year, or 1,100 calories per day. A two-year-old would need 1,000 + 200 calories for two years, or 1,200 calories per day.
- ❖ **Breakfast is the most important meal of the day.** Eating a nutritious breakfast is essential if you want to maintain a healthy, balanced diet. This is backed up by numerous studies, which all say that eating breakfast prepares your body both mentally and physically for the day ahead. Eating first thing in the morning stabilises your blood sugar levels, while missing out on breakfast can lead to fatigue and poor concentration. Not eating breakfast also slows down your metabolism and makes it more likely that you will "pig out" on unhealthy, sugary snacks. So, if you are trying to lose weight, missing out this essential meal is in fact one of the worst things you can do.
- ❖ **Increase your consumption of fruits and vegetables to five servings per day.** Fruits and vegetables are high in vitamins, minerals, and fibre, and are low in calories. Consume high-fibre foods like fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grain cereals, and dried beans. They'll make you feel fuller sooner and help lower your cholesterol, as well as protect you from numerous conditions including heart disease, cancer and stroke.

❖ **Eat fish rich in healthy omega-3 fatty acids like salmon, trout, herring, and canned tuna.** (Shark, swordfish, king mackerel, and tilefish – also known as golden bass or golden snapper – have the highest mercury levels and should be avoided by pregnant women and young children.) Omega-3 fatty acids have been shown to lower triglycerides and increase HDL (so-called “good”) cholesterol.

❖ **Avoid the saturated and trans fats typically found in fried foods, animal products, and many snack foods.** These foods contain partially hydrogenated fats that increase your risk of heart disease.

❖ **Limit the sodium in your diet by adding less salt, both when cooking and at the table, and by limiting packaged frozen foods, cured meats, and high-sodium condiments like soy sauce and salad dressings.** Remember that cardiovascular disease remains the leading cause of death in many western countries; it's imperative that we make some dietary and lifestyle changes.



Healthy Exercise as a Family

If you think of exercise as leading an active lifestyle, which you can do with your husband and kids, you'll be able to fit in more than you think. (Note: a workout doesn't always have to mean running laps or lifting weights, which requires you to set aside blocks of

time.) As a bonus, exercise with family does double duty as quality time – no small consideration given our jam-packed schedules.

❖ **Go for pre- or post-dinner walks.** Whether you walk into town or just cruise the neighbourhood, building a walk into your daily schedule ensures that it won't get put off. If you have small children, you can alternate time in and out of the stroller for them.

❖ **Crank up the music and boogie down.** Hold “dance evenings” with your kids.

Move the furniture aside, fill the CD player with dance tunes, and let the kids have fun and take turns using a flashlight as a

strobe light, in case you have a disco theme.

❖ **Make a game out of household chores, which also count as physical activity!** Pretend that dust creatures are invading earth and it's up to Captain [insert child's name] to save the day by capturing them with his broom. Make believe they are “Heroes” who need to save the toys by putting them safely in their toy chest, as well as helping you with other things you think are age appropriate. Also, turn folding laundry into a guessing game by asking them who they think the clothes belong to.



- ❖ **Snack workouts into other activities.** Have your toddler walk instead of riding in the cart at the supermarket, and take the stairs or walk up the escalator whenever possible.
- ❖ **Turn TV commercials into fitness breaks.** Invent silly names such Bob the Builder muscle builders for simple exercises like squats, push-ups, and sit ups, and then do them together till the show comes back on. You can also play "coach," in which you take turns "ordering" each other to "drop and give me five," or "follow the leader," in which one person leads the others in fun, simple moves like clapping, wiggling, and marching.
- ❖ **Walk or run for charity.** Model the value of exercise—and of giving back to society—by teaming up with your children for a fund-raising race. You might be surprised what fun your children could have.

- ❖ **Team up for gardening.** Kids are great at digging up dirt, so let them turn over the soil and help you plant new bulbs. Research shows that gardening is as good as weight training when it comes to preventing osteoporosis, and if you're planting and raising the vegetables, it can make them more appetizing to kids. In the summer, set up a sprinkler to water the lawn and challenge kids to duck the droplets.

Also, remember that incorporating as much physical activity into a child's schedule as possible, not only allows them to practice their emerging motor skills and strengthen their hearts, lungs, and muscles, but also sets them up with good habits which will hopefully last a lifetime.

Although it is not always easy to lead a well-balanced life due to certain realities in our everyday lives, we should always try to make things easier on ourselves by incorporating simple yet effective ways to boost our overall physical and mental wellbeing. †

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