

PREFACE

A NOTE TO PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

When my children were born, I wished there was a manual that came with them, giving step-by-step directions on how to parent them so they would be successful in every aspect of their lives, but there is no such manual. Being a parent is the most difficult and rewarding job we will ever have. We do it out of unconditional love for our children with the goal of making them better than us; we teach them to avoid the pitfalls we endured ourselves when we were children. That teaching requires addressing a long list of topics for discussion with our children to make sure they are happy and productive individuals. One of the most important discussions will be about proper nutrition and food choices; after all, eating is something we do every day! Make no mistake, food affects us and our children in every aspect of our lives, so wouldn't it be helpful to have a guide to make us accountable for the food choices we make for our children? Then they can be productive in every aspect of their lives. This book is not intended to be the "bible" for everything related to food and nutrition education for our children but rather a guide to help keep us parents accountable and aware of the decisions we make as we educate our children on food and nutrition. The secret to using this book as a tool

to help you as a parent is quite simple: You have to use it! You cannot read it, set it aside, and not take action. Positive change will only occur if you take the knowledge you attain from this book, customize it to your specific family dynamic, and then have the courage to implement it, knowing you will have failures and successes along the way.

This book is meant to be yours to read, write in, and take notes in. (See the food diary section of this book.) Use it to customize the message you are going to craft for your children and your family because the food choices we make for our children will be one of the most personal messages we will impart to them. I implore and challenge you to use this book as one of the tools in your arsenal. Use it to get your message across to your children about how to make healthy and sustainable food and nutrition choices that will last a lifetime.

INTRODUCTION

EVERY JOURNEY STARTS WITH A SINGLE STEP

I'm a father of twins, a girl and a boy. As a father, I've desperately wanted to prevent my children from having the issues I have had with obesity, social anxiety due to poor self-esteem, and the constant barrage of peer pressure from friends, relatives, and food manufacturers who spew misinformation about how to eat and maintain a healthy lifestyle. With degrees in biology, chemistry, and physical science, for over a decade I've served as a medical consultant educating physicians and surgeons on various disease states and surgical techniques with a variety of medical devices. I've also been a practicing martial artist for over twenty-two years. I've competed in numerous MMA tournaments, and trained with some of the best fighters in the world. Plus, I am a nutrition and fitness speaker and coach who has worked with numerous clients, including athletes, individuals, and numerous families to help them attain their nutrition and fitness goals.

Do you have kids who are “fussy eaters”? Do you seem unable to break them of their picky eating habits? Do you feel overwhelmed

about where to start educating your kids on proper nutrition and exercise habits? Are you concerned about the amount of sugar your family is consuming, but you feel powerless to stop it, let alone begin to address the issue?

I feel your pain, anxiety, and frustration. When my twins were born, I took a backseat in addressing these issues because I was scared to make a mistake, but once I overcame my fear of failure, I realized I would make mistakes and there would be days when I would feel like a failure, but there would also be days when I could hold up my head high and declare victory. Remember that every journey starts with a single step, but you have to take the first step.

What I offer in this book has worked for my family, clients, and me. I want to empower parents with tools and knowledge to help them educate themselves and their kids on how to eat healthy with no excuses, how to identify and break the addiction to sugar, and how to look at the food choices we make that have long-lasting effects.

If you apply the knowledge, strategies, and techniques offered in this book and tailor these solutions to your specific family dynamic, not only will you achieve success in overcoming the challenges you face as a parent or caregiver, but your children will be empowered with healthy habits to last them a lifetime.

I understand everyone's situation with his or her kids is unique, depending upon the set of challenges you face. You may be a single parent, or you may feel overwhelmed with the cost of feeding your kids healthy foods. Whatever your challenges, I sympathize, and I want reassure you of one universal truth: Even the smallest changes can have lasting effects; moreover, small changes added up over

time lead to sustainable long-term changes.

I am on this journey with you—as your coach, mentor, and accountability partner—every step of the way. When I became a parent, I felt like I was on this journey all by myself. I wrote this book because I made a promise to myself to make sure parents and caregivers don't feel alone in their challenges and frustrations. I want to help them educate their children on healthy habits when it comes to food, nutrition, and exercise.

Are you ready to put fear of failure and doubt aside and take the first of many steps that will have positive, long-term effects for not only your children but for you as well? If so, good. Let's get started and take this journey together! Now it's your time! Let's go!

1

WELCOME TO THE TABLE

*“One cannot think well, love well, sleep well
if one has not dined well.”*

— Virginia Woolf

In the above quote, legendary British author Virginia Woolf aptly sums up the importance of what we put into our bodies and, more importantly, our children’s bodies. This advice is more important today than ever because there is a definite lack of understanding in our society on how to make healthy food choices for our children, even with all the information out there.

The very first thing I want you to know is this: As a parent, *you* can teach your child about nutrition. It doesn’t matter whether your diet isn’t the best. It doesn’t matter whether you are overweight. It doesn’t matter whether you don’t know anything about nutrition. That’s why

you're reading this book, right? Whether this is your first step or one of many on the path to a healthier diet for your family, you have an amazing power at your fingertips—the power to be the most positive and influential person in your child's life in this area!

Of course, we all want what's best for our kids. We want them to avoid our mistakes, to be smarter, stronger, healthier, and more successful than we are. But many parents feel intimidated and overwhelmed by the thought of getting their children—and themselves—to eat better. If you want your child to eat healthily, you must use your influence in this area! One thing is for sure: No one else is going to.

Currently, more than 1 in 3 Americans will eat fast food today, tomorrow, and the next day according to the CDC, and 20 percent of all meals are eaten in a car.¹ That leaves room for very few “traditional” meals, which may or may not be home-cooked, eaten while sitting at the dinner table as a family. As it stands, American families spend more than half their money on meals that require no cooking.² What sort of legacy are we providing our children?

And it's doubtful your child will learn about nutrition at school. Heck, with the allotted time for lunch breaks dwindling, students are having difficulty finishing their meals, much less finding the time to make good decisions. So often our children are forced to eat blindly—if it isn't the school quickening the pace, it's harried parents saying, “Hurry up and finish your food.” And with television and online marketing campaigns promoting foods kids shouldn't eat—McDonald's

1 <http://www.latimes.com/science/la-sci-sn-fast-food-calories-kids-20150915-story.html> and <https://blog.partnersforyourhealth.com/blog/more-shocking-fast-food-statistics-you-should-know>.

2 <https://www.treehugger.com/green-food/americans-spend-more-half-their-food-money-meals-require-no-cooking.html>

alone spends \$17 billion annually marketing to children³—you’ll be hard-pressed to depend on big business for solutions.

It is even more doubtful that kids will learn about and pursue good nutrition on their own. Show me a child who naturally wants to eat steamed mustard greens when there are sugary cereals, cheese pizza, and sodas being marketed to him or her left and right. No, it is up to you, the guardian of your child’s wellbeing, to take it on. How and what your child eats now as well as how and what your child will eventually choose to eat on his or her own is up to you. No excuses, because there is no excuse. Core knowledge of food and nutrition is something all children deserve—and it’s something that we, as parents and caregivers, must provide them.

Food is our fuel and our sustenance. It is literally and figuratively a part of who we are. While I want you to celebrate the social and psychological importance of breaking bread with your children (statistically, they’ll do better academically), let’s also consider the undeniable health benefits. A child who doesn’t eat dinner with a parent at least twice a week is 40 percent more likely to be overweight.⁴ Anne Fischel, professor at Harvard Medical School, offers, “Young adults who ate regular family meals as teens are less likely to be obese and more likely to eat healthily on their own.”⁵ What children eat undeniably influences their physical and mental health; their diets can even define their upbringings and give them a better sense of who they are and what they hold important.

3 James McNeal quoted in B. Horovitz. “Six Strategies Marketers use to Make Kids Want Things Bad.” *USA Today*. November 22, 2006, 1B.

4 <http://healthbeginswithmom.com/sacred-family-meal/>

5 https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/01/12/the-most-important-thing-you-can-do-with-your-kids-eat-dinner-with-them/?utm_term=.5bd047b8113b

So make a commitment to clear off the junk from the dinner table and eat nutritious meals with your children every day. Involve your whole family in this effort. Make a meal together, even if it's a simple meal, and then sit together, as a family, to eat. This is a child's birth-right. Family mealtime is sacred.

Take your family to visit a farmer's market or a local farm. Once you have an idea of where food comes from, you'll begin to look at it differently. Then bring the lesson home: Consider planting a garden, even if it's just an herb garden in a windowsill. Planting the seeds together and watching your food grow is empowering for your child and for you as a parent. It creates a whole new level of excitement about food, and a foundation for trying some new, perhaps "scary" foods—like vegetables, one of the most overlooked food groups in the American diet today.

If this sounds like a lot of work, something you don't have time for or your child won't get on board with, consider what you would do if your child were bringing home Ds and Fs on his report card and the teacher called you in for a conference. Chances are, you'd take the time to talk with your child about how to improve his study habits. You'd require that she start paying attention in class, completing homework, studying the material assigned, and asking for help with things she didn't understand. You'd find time to help her study or take advantage of a tutoring program, and you might restrict her privileges until her grades improve.

We take our children's grades seriously because we know they impact their future. Children can't always see this, and we can't expect them to have good study habits without our guidance. We have to teach them these skills and motivate them with rewards and restrictions. But for some reason, many of us don't take what our kids eat

as seriously. We say, “He is such a picky eater!” or “He just won’t eat healthy food!” or “I don’t have time to cook!” And yet what our children eat and don’t eat also impacts their futures in ways that are more than physical. It affects their energy for learning and their ability to concentrate, which ultimately impacts how well they do in school.

The consequences of not making a change are dire. For those born in the year 2000, one in three whites, two out of three Hispanics, and two out of three African-Americans will develop diabetes.⁶ For the first time in history, a generation will die at a younger age than their parents did.⁷ What a devastating reality—but a reality that each of us has the power to change. Because of this situation, you will hear me preach throughout this book about the perils of sugar, specifically added sugar. I will repeat over and over how there’s no excuse for not educating your child and yourself on the very real dangers of sugar.

When our kids are young is when we have the best opportunity to shape their notions of healthy eating, but there are so many gray areas in nutrition that can and do confuse kids. Even as adults, we get confused. For example, eating pizza once every couple of weeks may be fine, but eating it every day is not. Where do you draw the line? Furthermore, how do you get a four-year-old to draw the line?

I developed the No Excuses philosophy to help kids at a young age clearly define what is healthy and what is not. My approach helps kids to know what is “good” and what is “bad” in a concrete, black-and-white way so they are sound on the principles of healthy eating. It is a message they can grasp and understand. No Excuse Eating

6 <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2003/06/diab-j19.html>

7 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/2449040/Children-will-die-younger-than-their-parents-minister-warns.html>

also makes it easy for parents to set the standard for healthy eating for their young ones. We parents lay down the rules, and as our kids get older, we provide them with more tools and knowledge to make their own smarter and more informed choices when presented with nutritional gray areas.

No Excuse Eating is about eating with intention and leading by example. It is about being educated on what a spear of broccoli (or other whole food goodie) potentially offers the human body in regards to nutrients. We live in a time when we have greater access to information than ever before, so much so that it can feel overwhelming to know where to begin. That's where I come in. In this book, I provide the simple tools and concise knowledge you need to teach your children to eat with intention. To teach them to eat as a family. To teach them to make conscious, responsible choices about the food they put in their bodies. To teach them that there are no excuses. Welcome to the table.