



Dr. Smith's Little Handbook of Health

A Guide for Parents



Dear Parents,

This is the parent guidance booklet for the 'Little Handbook of Health' which we have given to all Year 7, 8 & 9 students. It is part of a school-wide initiative to help our girls develop 10 habits to keep them healthy throughout their lives.

The aim of the guide is simply to suggest some actions you may wish to try to help your daughter steer her way through an increasingly unhealthy world. You will already have your own views on how best to do this, so use it as you see fit; respond as much or as little as time, money, belief and energy allow.

The advice is mainly based on information from 3 books:

The Blue Zones by Dan Buettner

The 4 Pillar Plan by Dr Rangan Chatterjee

Mindless Eating by Brian Wansink

Please ask your daughter to show you her student handbook in which I explain the background to our habits and suggest some actions she may take to develop these habits. The students chose 1 habit to start with and up to 3 actions.

This parent booklet gives you some extended background and suggestions as to how you could create a habitat that would support your daughter in developing these habits.

Background Information

Doctors have realised that many common illnesses can be influenced simply by the way we live our lives - the habits we develop. In many cases, changing these lifestyle habits can be more effective than taking medicines.

In an effort to seek out the habits that keep us healthy, researchers have studied the 5 places in the world where people live the longest and have low levels of chronic disease. These are found in Okinawa Japan, a cluster of mountain villages in Sardinia, the Greek island of Ikaria, the Nicoya region of Costa Rica and in Loma Linda California. They are known as Blue Zones. The researchers were surprised to discover that, although these long-lived communities were many miles apart, they had many habits in common.

Using this information I have developed 10 habits that I think will be accessible for our students. Understandably I have replaced the Blue Zone habit of drinking a small amount of alcohol each day with getting enough sleep.

We cannot all move to a Blue Zone, however we could adopt some of their habits. because, not only might it help our daughters live longer, but there is evidence that it could make them happier as well.

Healthy Planet

1. Changing your carbon footprint

Healthy Mind-Set

2. Living - *They had a reason for living, a sense of purpose.*

3. Chilling - *They took opportunities to relax and de-stress.*

Healthy Relationships

4. Loving - *They put their family first.*

5. Belonging - *They belonged to a community.*

6. Choosing - *They chose to spend their time with other healthy people.*

Healthy Body

7. Feeding - *They ate moderate portions of fresh, local, unprocessed food.*

8. Planting - *They mainly ate plant based foods and often grew their own vegetables.*

9. Moving - *The exercise they did was part of their normal day (walking to work or gardening)*

10. Snoozing - *They got sufficient sleep, often taking daily naps.*

In this book I will review the 10 habits and suggest some simple ways you might foster them in your daughters. It is more important that they achieve a balance between each of these habits rather than putting all their energy into one or two. For example, it is not helpful for them to be an amazing sleeper who eats lots of unhealthy food, or fantastically fit but permanently stressed.

The changes suggested are small, but hopefully they will become lifelong. They are all entirely voluntary.

10 Habits

to help you live a big, long,
happy and healthy life



 **Healthy Mind-Set**

 **Healthy Relationships**

 **Healthy Body**

Feeding



It is important to try to establish healthy eating habits early on. As parents, you are likely to do the food shopping, the cooking, order takeaways and determine family meals out so you have a number of opportunities to influence your daughter's eating.

Nowadays, however, knowing what foods to eat is really hard. Not only is the advice confusing, but it keeps changing; eat carbs, don't eat carbs; fat was bad, now not so bad. What is clear is that increasingly we eat too much and become overweight. People try to reverse this by dieting but, unfortunately, 95% of diets do not work because they are hard to keep to so most people revert back to their previous eating habits.

The Blue Zone communities do not eat too much and they do not go on diets. They eat moderate amounts of food that is fresh, unprocessed, local and made mainly of plants.

Essentially, they avoid food that is old, has been messed about with or has travelled long distances. They do eat sugary treats, but only on special occasions like birthdays or Christmas. They like sitting down to eat their meals with their family and their last meal of the day is often the smallest and is eaten quite early.

Using this information and the most recent thinking on diet here are 5 simple actions you could take:

If your daughter chooses any feeding actions then she needs to agree these with you to ensure they are right ones for her and that she does not eat too much or too little.

Narrow your feeding window.

Try to establish a healthy feeding routine that limits the total window of time in the day during which you will eat. For example, if you eat your breakfast at seven in the morning and eat your last meal at seven in the evening then your body gets 12 hours free from food, something known as a microfast. Your body uses the time you are not eating for repair and maintenance of your cells, as well as for burning up unwanted fat. You will extend your eating window and lose this benefit if you eat or snack late into the evening. Micro fasting may help prevent or control type 2 diabetes and eating fewer calories late at night has been shown to combat obesity.

Suggestions

- Eat breakfast as late as practical
- Where possible have your last meal early in the evening
- Breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince and dine like a pauper i.e. eat fewer calories in the evening
- Avoid snacking after your evening meal or before you go to bed

Avoid foods with lots of ingredients

Much of the food we eat is processed by food companies to make it more attractive. It is mechanically altered and chemicals are added to make it sweeter, last longer and look more appealing. These highly refined foods are regarded by some experts as low quality food and may cause a number of inflammatory diseases. One rule of thumb is to favour foods that have fewer ingredients in them, i.e. ones that closely resemble their original state. So chicken should look like chicken and potato like potato. The least altered foods will be those that are fresh and the locally produced.

Suggestions

- Eat less processed food and more food that has not been changed very much (fewer than 5 ingredients)
- Teach your daughter how to cook some staple meals using basic ingredients
- Use local produce where possible

Drink lots of water

Almost two thirds of our bodies are made of water so it is not surprising that if your daughter loses too much water and becomes dehydrated, her body will not work as well. This may cause headaches, tiredness and dry skin. It is best to try to get her to drink at least a litre of water a day. She could drink it before meals, after meals or during the day, whenever she prefers. She can tell if she is well hydrated because her urine will be light yellow to clear in colour!

Suggestions

- Give your daughter a one litre drink bottle
- Have a jug of water and glasses at the meal table
- Keep a jug of cold water in the fridge

Eat less sugar.

Sugar is highly addictive: the more she eats, the more she will crave. Signs of overreliance include feeling the need to eat every 2 hours, an afternoon slump and irritability between meals.

In the past when we were hunter gatherers, the desire to eat sugary foods helped us to store energy. Now we are constantly surrounded by sugary foods this craving makes us consume too much, and is leading to health issues like obesity and diabetes. Sugar is hiding everywhere and many foods contain more sugar than you would think, for example low-fat yogurt, ketchup and fruit juice.

Try some of the suggestions below as over time small changes make a big difference.

Suggestions.

- Reserve biscuits, cakes and sweets for special occasions
- Replace refined sugar based snacks with nuts, fruit or olives
- If she wants a soft drink give her the diet version
- Read food labels and avoid items with a high sugar content (more than 8g per portion)
- Hide the sugary snacks so they are not constantly on view
- When giving out sugary snacks consider giving out half portions eg 1 biscuit rather than 2
- Do not add sugar to coffee, tea or cereal etc
- Favour reduced sugar items

Eat until you are 80% full

Nowadays there is a tendency to eat too much. We eat large portions and rarely leave anything behind. We do not respond to feelings of fullness or hunger, but instead focus on eating everything in front of us. Food cartons and serving sizes are often large and many food outlets encourage you to go even larger. The 80% full habit encourages people to stop eating, not when their plate is empty but when they begin to feel any pressure in their stomach from a meal indicating they are becoming full (80%)

Long term weight loss is best achieved by making a small reduction in calorie intake over a long period of time as larger reductions in intake can cause the body to resist the change. Known as the mindless margin this reduction should be approximately 100-200 fewer calories per day. One less KitKat a day equates to 14lbs loss over a year.

Suggestions

- Use smaller plates (8 inch)
- Serve drinks out of tall thin glasses
- Get her to slow down the speed at which she eats
- Pre-portion plates and keep the remaining food out of site
- Allow her to leave food on the plate
- Buy smaller the smaller packs of food/cartons
- Pre-portion treats into smaller amounts
- Try to break eating habits like coming home and immediately eating salty snacks
- Keep treats out of sight
- Eat before you go shopping

Planting



The Blue Zone communities eat a diet that is 95% plant based. Although they are not all strict vegetarians, they do not consume very much meat. Typically, they eat a small serving of meat (3-4oz) about five times per month.

Studies have shown that avoiding meat can reduce the risk of developing several diseases such as heart disease and cancer. It might therefore be beneficial to favour plant based foods such as:

- Vegetables
- Legumes (e.g. beans, peas, lentils & chickpeas)
- Whole grains
- Nuts

Vegetables have particular health benefits as they are rich in fibre, vitamins and minerals and they help keep the gut healthy. There is a whole range of coloured vegetables: green, red, orange, yellow, blue, purple and beige. It is thought that eating a wide range of different coloured vegetables encourages a variety of gut bacteria to flourish and these play a major part in protecting us against disease.

Many Blue Zone communities grow their own vegetables. This is a winning formula because not only does it provide fresh, unprocessed local vegetables, but it also provides the opportunity for movement and relaxation.

Suggestions

- Have a meat free day each week
- Reduce the meat portions to 3-4oz (the size of a deck of cards)
- Learn to cook some vegetarian meals together
- Help your daughter grow some vegetables
- Increase the number of different coloured vegetables you give her over a week
- Try to give her at least two types of vegetables a day
- Use nuts, carrots, cherry tomatoes, sugar snap peas etc. as snacks
- Try some non-meat substitutes like Quorn nuggets

Moving

Whilst it is common knowledge that exercise has a whole range of health benefits we now move around much less than we did in the past.



We use cars for the shortest of journeys, many jobs are sedentary and our most popular forms of entertainment involve sitting down in front of a screen. In addition, we have cleverly invented a range of machines to reduce the need for manual effort, like leaf blowers so we don't have to sweep or food processors so we don't have to stir. It certainly makes life easier, but it means we have massively reduced our daily physical effort compared with our grandparents. It is not unusual for many people to go all week without breaking into a sweat from physical activity.

To counter this, many people schedule in sessions of intense exercise like a gym workout or a run. Once done, they feel that their quota of physical exercise is complete and go back to sedentary ways for the rest of the week. The problem is that, just like diets, it is hard to keep these sessions going and often they are not frequent or prolonged enough for the weight loss people hope for. On the other hand, overdoing it can cause injury or exhaustion which results in no physical activity at all!

The Blue Zone people do not go to the gym or run marathons, their exercise comes from the movement involved in their daily lives. They will walk to most places and they use the stairs. They will do household chores by hand and they will dig, hoe, weed and harvest their gardens. Many of them have jobs that require physical effort like farming or labouring. They do not sit down for very long.

If your daughter is not involved in regular physical activity encourage some of the following

Suggestions

- Get her to use the stairs instead of lifts or elevators
- Encourage her to walk to school if possible (with a friend if possible)
- Encourage her to walk/cycle/swim several times a week
- Get her to join a club or group that involves physical activity
- If you have a dog, get her to take it for a walk
- Encourage her to help in the garden
- Break up sessions of screen based inactivity with something physical.
- Consider an activity holiday

Snoozing



We are designed to spend about a third of our lives asleep because it enables our bodies to rest, recover, repair and grow. However, in today's 24 hour world, many of us are not getting enough sleep and it has been estimated that teenagers get between one and two hours' less sleep a night than their grandparents. Over a 70 year life this is equal to about 51,000 hours less sleep. No wonder then, that many of them experience symptoms of being sleep deprived: tiredness, irritability, lack of concentration. Over time they can build up a sleep debt that will not be repaid with just an extra hour here or there.

It is difficult to say how much sleep each of us needs (probably between 8 and 10 hours for teenagers) but if we wake up feeling refreshed, wake up at roughly the same time without an alarm and fall asleep within 30 minutes of going to bed, we are probably getting enough.

It will not surprise you to discover that people in Blue Zones get sufficient sleep. They also often take daytime naps of up to 30 minutes. They do not have to go to sleep, wake up or go to work at set hours. They just sleep as much as their body tells them to.

Most of us do not have this luxury but there are plenty of things we can do to improve sleep. The first thing to do is create a sleep-friendly bedroom that blocks out as much light and sound as possible, from heavy blackout curtains to covering up small LED lights.

Phones, tablets and computer screens make noises and give out the same light as the morning sun which tricks your brain into thinking it is time to get up. You can get devices or software that reduce these emissions but not using them in the period leading up to bed is a more effective solution, whilst the radical solution is to ban them from the bedroom.

Establishing a relaxing bedtime routine, perhaps by getting your daughter to have a bath, listen to some music, turn off her electronic devices and avoid as far as possible activities that will make her tense, like an emotive film or video game. As far as possible try to get her to go to bed and get up at the same time as this helps her body to establish its rhythm.

Suggestions

- Help her block all light and, where possible, sound from the bedroom
- Stop screen use an hour before bedtime
- Make sure she has a comfortable bed
- Encourage a bedtime routine
- Get her to go to bed and get up at roughly the same time each day
- Let her have the occasional microsleep (less than 30mins)

Loving



For Blue Zone communities, family is the number one priority and they build their lives around this core. Elderly relatives live with their families (or nearby) and are involved in the lives of the younger generations. They eat meals together, celebrate birthdays and anniversaries and generally support each other. This has been shown to make them healthier, have lower stress levels, and reduces accidents and maintains their mental and social skills.

Parents invest time and love in their children, who in time are more likely to care for them when they get older.

Suggestions

This habit is dependent on your family set up and dynamics but where possible:

- Eat family meals together
- Encourage your daughter to spend time with elderly relatives
- Encourage her to help/play with siblings or younger relatives
- Spend dedicated time with her doing something fun and/or relaxing.
- Get her to participate in family celebrations
- Get her to plot the family tree

Belonging



Blue Zones are typically religious communities. A number of studies have shown that being religious is associated with a lower risk of death, which may in part be due to the strong support network these communities provide along with a more optimistic outlook on life.

If your family is not part of a religious community then there are benefits to be had from belonging to other types of groups such as clubs and societies, the neighbourhood community, Form, Year or House groups.

Suggestions

- Encourage her to embrace her faith and be involved in its activities
- Encourage her to become involved in community activities
- Encourage her to join an club, society or group
- Encourage her involved in voluntary work
- Encourage her to embrace House and school activities

Choosing



Blue Zone people hang out with Blue Zone people. Sometimes this is because they are in isolated communities but if they have a choice, they choose to surround themselves with people with Blue Zone values. This makes it so much easier for them to continue their good habits. Studies show that smoking, obesity, happiness, and even loneliness are contagious, so having social networks of healthy people can actually help keep you healthy.

Get your daughter to spend more time with friends who exhibit Blue Zone habits like healthy eating, relaxing or movement.

Suggestions

- Encourage your daughter to develop blue zone habits with a friend
- Encourage her to spend more time with friends who have healthy habits
- Encourage her to engage in activities like walking, singing, dancing and volunteering with friends
- Get her to support her friends by listening, laughing with them, praising and encouraging them

Living



The people who live in Blue Zones have a strong sense of purpose. They know why they wake up in the morning because they tend to have goal in life, something they are working towards. It does not have to be anything earth shattering, it can be something as simple as seeing their grandchildren happy and successful, but by having this sense of purpose, they may lower their stress levels and reduce the chances of having arthritis or a stroke.

Get her to consider what it is that she gets up in the morning for? What is it she loves doing? What does she have a passion or talent for? Is there a career or interest she would like to pursue? Alternatively, is there anything new that she would like to develop, such as learning a new instrument or language? Get her to find her reason for getting up in the morning.

Suggestions

- Help her identify some goals and review them with her regularly
- Support any actions she takes towards achieving these goals
- Encourage her talents, skills and interests
- Encourage her to develop hobbies
- Encourage her to support a charity or cause

Chilling

The modern world can generate a good deal of unwanted stress: there are never enough hours in the day, relationships can be very demanding and social media requires our constant attention. Our bodies are not designed for this continuous stress, so we can become ill. Learning to switch-off can be an antidote.



The Blue Zone communities have routines that shed stress. They set aside time in the day where they can escape the commotion of life by focussing on themselves, for example by taking a nap, praying, or spending time remembering their ancestors.

Your daughter could do the same by scheduling a time in the day that is just for her, when she stops everything and has some 'me' time, free from distractions.

She could use the time for anything, as long as it does not involve your phone or a computer. She could try cooking, painting, meditation, singing, having a bath, playing an instrument, reading a book, dancing, yoga, gardening, colouring in, the list is endless. This relaxed time may help her feel less pressurised, lower her stress hormone levels and counter the long term effects of stress.

If she feels she doesn't have time for this, it is possible she needs it the most!

Suggestions

- Help her to create a space at home for quiet time
- Encourage her to set aside time in each day for mindfulness, meditation, prayer or relaxation
- Encourage her to take up yoga, Pilates or Tai chi
- Encourage screen free time in the week
- Encourage her to draw, paint, colour, sing, dance, make music or engage in a hobby
- Encourage reading, listening to music or relaxing in the bath

Changing Your Carbon Footprint



Climate change is likely to be the defining issue of your daughter's generation. If we want them to live a long, happy and healthy life then they need a healthy planet. However, the planet is warming up fast faster than at any time in the Earth's history - and if this continues it has significant consequences for people and wildlife around the globe. Efforts are now focussed on keeping temperatures from increasing no more than 1.5 degrees, and everyone can play their part.

Global warming is caused through human activities like the burning of fossil fuels, farming and deforestation, all of which generate an excess of greenhouse gasses like carbon dioxide. Nearly everything a person does releases an amount of carbon into the atmosphere, their carbon footprint. By making the right choices they can reduce their footprint and help combat climate change.

We have suggested that students take the following actions which are in their control:

- Eat less meat and more local produce and use up leftovers
- Don't buy fast fashion buy vintage or recycled clothing
- Switch lights off and unplug electric devices when not in use
- Walk or cycle or use public transport instead of the car
- Use reusable bags
- Shower instead of bath
- Plant a tree

You might like to consider, if at all possible helping them further by;

- Driving slower - walk or cycle where practical
- Using public transport
- Only flying when necessary
- Insulating your home
- Use energy saving light bulbs
- Invest in solar panels
- Using less water

As a school we will try to equip them to becoming the politicians, the scientists, the journalists and the policy makers of the future, and put themselves in a position to make an even bigger difference.

Getting the habit habit

So, eager to get your daughter going? Keen to establish her new habits immediately?

Diet and fitness regimes often fail because they involve too much, too soon so aim for small changes that your daughter can sustain over a long period of time, a lifetime.

Your daughter will start by picking the three habits that she thinks she will find the easiest and try to develop them over the next 10 weeks. She will commit to these habits by choosing up to 3 of the actions suggested in her booklet.

It would be great if she teams up with a friend or family member as doing this together increases the likelihood of success.

Research shows that it can take between 5-12 weeks to develop a habit but if you get past 10 weeks then your chances of relapse are much lower. If she slips up, encourage her not to quit, but to brush herself down and keep going. Get her to avoid catastrophic thinking where if she slips up once she decides she might as well give up on that habit or worse still give up on all of them. As she becomes successful with her initial habits she can gradually introduce some others.

Some activities can be multi-habit ones, for example if she takes her grandma to a vegetarian cooking course with her best friend she will actual hit every habit (as long as she has a nap after eating the lovely food she has made.)

Finally your daughter does not need to be healthy all the time, as I always say, 'Everything in moderation...including moderation.'

