



# eat well, live well, *play well*

WITH THE EVER-INCREASING NUMBER OF PEOPLE PRONE TO STRESS-RELATED ILLNESSES AND RISING CHILDHOOD OBESITY, IT'S TIME TO CHANGE SOME LIFESTYLE CHOICES

Let's face it, being a working parent often means that you don't have enough time to prepare nutritious meals every day, let alone make it to the gym for a stress-busting physical workout. Besides shopping and schlepping to and from meetings, dentist appointments, fetching the kids from playschool and running a million other little errands that leave you feeling flat and frustrated by the time you get home, the life of a working parent can easily tip the scale to light up with red warning signs of an unhealthy lifestyle. These most usually reflect not only the status of your own well-being, but also that of your family.

So, how can you avoid this vicious circle? The ideal is difficult to achieve, but it isn't impossible. When it comes to making good decisions regarding the health of your family, the main factors to consider and learn more about are nutrition, exercise and stress management. We spoke to both local and international experts to hear what they had to say...

## Down with TV and fizzy drinks

According to Patrick Holford, world-leading author on nutrition, the two biggest predictors of a child being overweight are the number of hours spent watching

television and the amount of fizzy drinks that they are allowed. "Normally, when you are thirsty you should drink some water. But let's say that you are thirsty and you drink a sweetened drink. It raises your blood sugar, and if you don't need all that sugar for energy, the excess is converted into fat," he explains. When the bloodstream becomes too concentrated in sugar, the body will tell you that you're thirsty, to drink water to dilute it, but if instead you go and drink more sodas, you get into this vicious cycle. "So, drinks are the real villains. If you have a two-litre bottle of a cola drink, you are looking at on average 45 teaspoons of sugar, and about the equivalent of three espressos." And diet drinks are not much better, since they are still giving you the caffeine, which raises your blood sugar. Even many juices, which are a seemingly 'healthier alternative' have very concentrated sweeteners, and should be limited to a glass a day. "Children really should be brought up drinking water when they're thirsty," advises Patrick. "When you are thirsty, you drink water. When you have a meal, you drink water." Water makes a big difference and one should have about eight glasses every day.

## Set the right example

Very often, behind the question: "I can't get my child to eat the healthy food, what do I do?" – is, what are you eating? It is very obvious that your children will eat what you eat (a case of 'monkey see, monkey do'). In

the first few years of life, the father usually plays a very little role in that. The baby is in a relationship with the mother, since the mother feeds them. The father only really starts to influence what the child eats from the age of four onwards. So the child will follow the mother in what they eat, and it is the most important piece of conditioning that you can ever do. One way or another, you are going to be programming your child in their food tastes. And the question is, do you do it consciously, or do you become a puppet for the food manufacturers, who are going to communicate to your kids about some little plastic gizmo in a particular cereal that they will then demand you buy? The real answer is very simple; you just don't have the bad stuff available. If you have three cereals, the one may be an oat-based cereal, or sugar-free cornflakes, or a muesli. Then they still have a choice, but it is from a healthier variety. And if you always have a large bowl of fruit and a lot of different varieties of fruit, the question is, would you rather have an apple or a pear or a banana or some berries, not a chocolate or a packet of crisps!

## Childhood obesity: a big deal

A study published in 1996 showed how much influence parents have on their children's weight. The study found that when one parent is obese, a child has a 40% possibility of becoming obese too. This risk increases to 80% if both parents are overweight. When neither parent is overweight, the child has