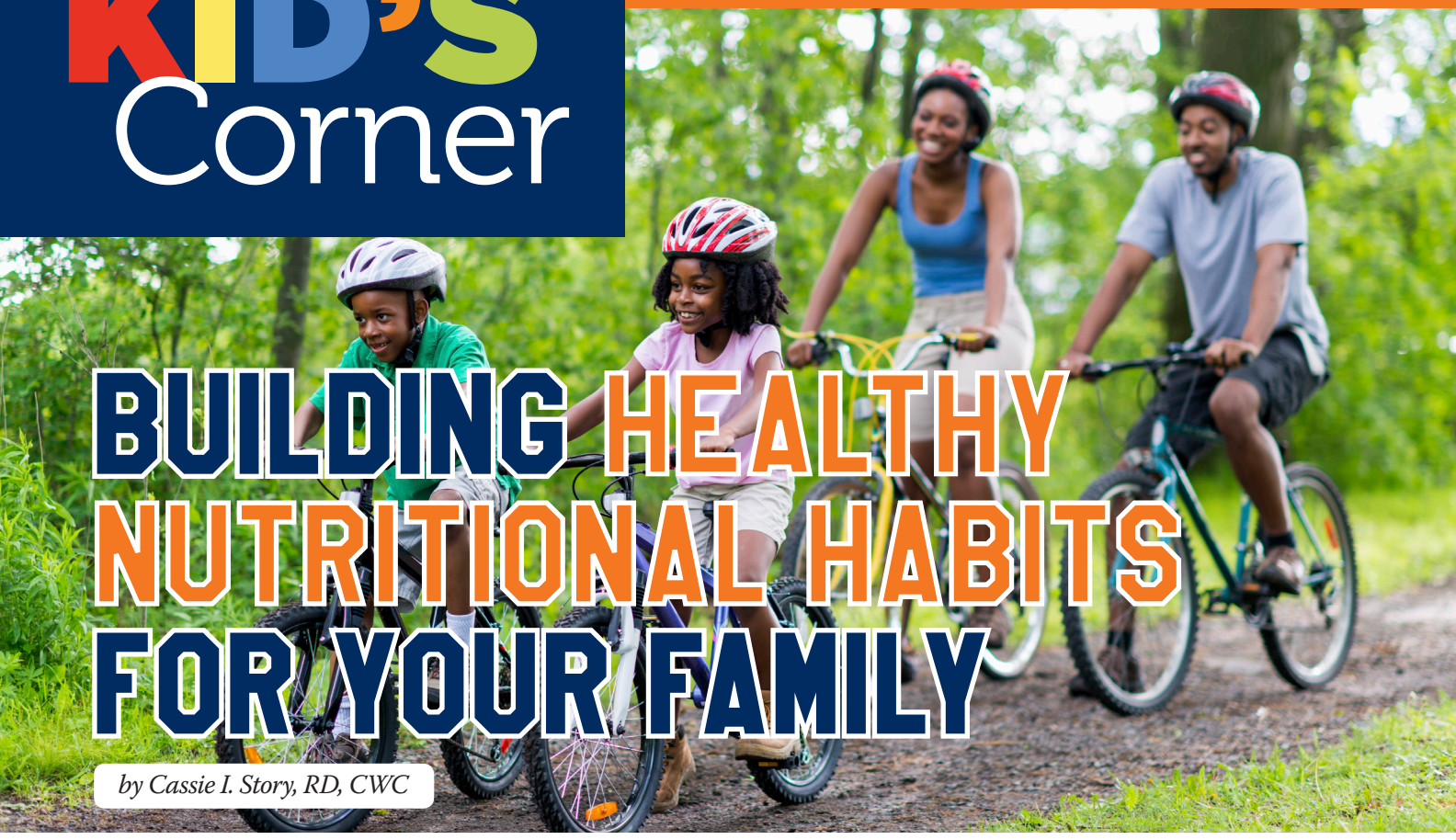
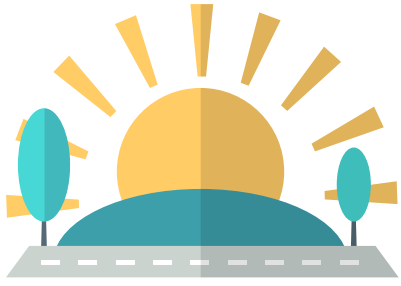
KID'S Corner



BUILDING HEALTHY NUTRITIONAL HABITS FOR YOUR FAMILY

by Cassie I. Story, RD, CWC

"Three, two, one, go!" The fake gunshot boomed and we were set loose. The butterflies in my stomach started to fly away as we began jogging through the warm spring air on our first race as a family.



This was no ordinary race, with professional runners who train for months in advance. No, this was a fun run. A one-mile obstacle course with: foam, slime, water guns, cargo nets that required climbing, mouse traps which needed to be avoided, and balance beams that required, well, balance.

This was supposed to be "fun," right? As a single mother of two young girls, I was nervous. How would they do? Was the course too difficult or too far? Was I going to get slime in my eyes?

How did I get us into this mess? A friend of mine invited us to sign-up with her and her family. "Sure!" I exclaimed. I am an avid runner, and have completed five half-mile marathons. What I have not done is involve my children. This sounded like the perfect family event.

The night prior to the race I prepared my daughters. We laid out our perfectly pink outfits and I gave them a good pep talk about racing etiquette. "This is for fun." "Stay with our team." "Don't run ahead." "Please help me not get slime in my eyes." You know, the usual race day advice.

Back at the race, the gunshot boomed and we were off. Did my darling daughters listen to me and stay with the group? No - they ran ahead and never looked back. They amazed me. One obstacle after another they tackled with pure joy and excitement, never knowing how hesitant their mom was watching their every step.

As parents, I think we often underestimate our children's abilities. Experiencing something new with my daughters opened my eyes to what they are capable of. Once we crossed the finish line, we were rewarded with our finisher medals. I will cherish those medals above all others on my wall.

STEPS TO BUILD HEALTHY HABITS AS A FAMILY:

BE A ROLE MODEL

LET THEM SEE YOU TRY NEW THINGS (new foods, activities, and self-care techniques).

TRY NEW FOODS TOGETHER. If you try something and don't like it that's okay, but let your children see you try new foods and encourage them to do the same.

DON'T GIVE UP TOO EARLY. Some studies suggest that a child needs to be exposed to a food nine to 15 times before they like it (adults only need three to five times). On the other hand, do not force them to eat everything on their plate. Offer a new food and allow them to take one bite. Do not force them to eat an entire serving of something they don't enjoy.

EAT MEALS TOGETHER. This improves physical and mental health for all members of the family. Turn off the TV and enjoy each other's company.

SET YOUR FAMILY UP FOR SUCCESS

LIMIT SCREEN TIME. Standard recommendations are to limit screen time (TV, computer, video games, tablets, phones) to two hours or less per day.

ENCOURAGE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY. Have a designated area in your home with age appropriate activities: jump ropes, sidewalk chalk (for hopscotch), balls, sporting equipment, hula hoops, bicycles, etc.

HAVE HEALTHY FOOD IN YOUR PANTRY, REFRIGERATOR AND FREEZER. You don't need to have "kid foods" on hand. Prepackaged foods that appeal to children are typically loaded with sugar, salt and fat. Focus on whole and minimally processed foods. Examples include: nuts or natural nut butters, apples or no-sugar-added applesauce, grapes, carrots, snap peas, yogurt or cheese sticks.

ANTICIPATE SETBACKS

IT'S UNLIKELY THAT EVERYONE IN YOUR FAMILY WILL BE IN THE SAME PLACE WITH THEIR DESIRE TO CHANGE. Some members of your family may really enjoy their nightly bowl of ice cream while watching TV and may not want to change that behavior. Be open and honest with how that affects you and your health goals and come up with creative solutions to support each other.

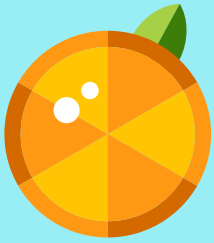
SET SMALL, ATTAINABLE GOALS AND BUILD ON THEM EACH WEEK. For example, "We will watch our favorite TV show together this Tuesday after we've gone on a 15 minute walk."

OFFER REWARDS AND CELEBRATE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

CREATE A NON-FOOD BASED REWARD SYSTEM. When you meet your daily or weekly goals as a family, reward yourselves with a trip to a favorite park, museum, art show, festival, movie, etc. Get creative and find things that you enjoy doing together.

PRACTICAL TIPS

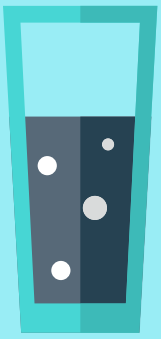
FOOD



EAT BREAKFAST. It can be small and simple, but plan at least a few minutes every morning for breakfast. Examples include: yogurt with berries and granola, whole rolled oats (add cottage cheese or protein powder if you need to increase your protein intake) with a banana, whole wheat toast with nut butter and a small drizzle of honey.

PREPARE MEALS TOGETHER. Have the kids help in the kitchen. Studies have shown that children who help prepare meals are more likely to eat the food being served. Young children can help wash produce and stir or pour items in recipes, and older children and teens can help you prepare entire meals.

LIMIT FAST FOOD. On busy nights, stop at the grocery store and grab a rotisserie chicken, ready-to-steam frozen vegetables, and an easy-to-prepare whole grain side (brown rice, quinoa, or minimally processed sweet potato fries).



ELIMINATE SUGARY BEVERAGES. Numerous studies point to the negative health effects of drinking beverages that contain calories. Keep your home environment free of beverages that provide calories from sugar. Soda, sports drinks, juice drinks, etc. should be limited to special occasions only.

EAT MORE FRUITS AND VEGETABLES. If you tend to leave fruits and vegetables rotting on the counter only to throw away once they've gone bad, spend a little more money and purchase pre-cut produce. Keep fruits and vegetables on the counter or eye level for your children in the refrigerator. Wash and cut produce as soon as you get home from the store (again, remember ask your children to help).

ACTIVITY

LIMIT SCREEN TIME TO TWO HOURS OR LESS PER DAY.

WHEN YOU DO WATCH TV HAVE A DANCE PARTY DURING COMMERCIALS - PUT ON A CURRENT FAVORITE SONG AND DANCE WITH YOUR CHILDREN.

SIGN YOUR CHILDREN UP FOR A RECREATIONAL SPORTS LEAGUE. KEEP TRYING DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES UNTIL THEY FIND ONE THEY TRULY ENJOY.

GO ON WALKS TOGETHER AS A FAMILY. MAKE IT AN ADVENTURE!

SLEEP AND SUPPORT

THERE ARE DIFFERENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SLEEP FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY. Adults need about eight hours per night, teens need around nine hours, children need 10 hours, and preschoolers need about 11 hours (including naps).

CREATE A BEDTIME ROUTINE. Listen to relaxing music or a guided meditation, read a book as a family, or simply rub a calming scented lotion (such as lavender) on your hands and feet and take a few deep breaths before you get into bed.

BE AWARE OF YOUR SELF-TALK. Don't criticize your own body or make negative remarks about others. Avoid comparing your weight and size to other people. Little (or maybe big) ears are listening. Show appreciation for each person's uniqueness and focus on life-long, healthy habits - not a number on the scale.

CONCLUSION

It's never too late to change family patterns. It takes continual effort, persistence and focus to make a change. Each family has different needs, likes and dislikes, schedules and many other factors that need to be considered.

Think of yourselves as a team. Sit down as a family and decide what's important to you, choose a team name and set rules and expectations. When you work together and support each other, the sky's the limit - just watch out for slime if you sign up for a fun run!

About the Author:
Cassie I. Story, RD, is a dietitian who has been working with bariatric patients for the past 10 years. She recently started a food blog, **www.WLSDailyPlate.com**, *to help inspire healthy eating following weight-loss surgery. She enjoys cooking, hiking, and spending time with her two daughters in Arizona.*

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OAC
Obesity Action Coalition

ABOUT THE **OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)**

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.

VIBRANT COMMUNITY

NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

ANNUAL CONVENTION

ADVOCACY

PUBLIC EDUCATION

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs • Community Discussion Forum • Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections

AND MUCH MORE

JOIN TODAY: GO TO **OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN**

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