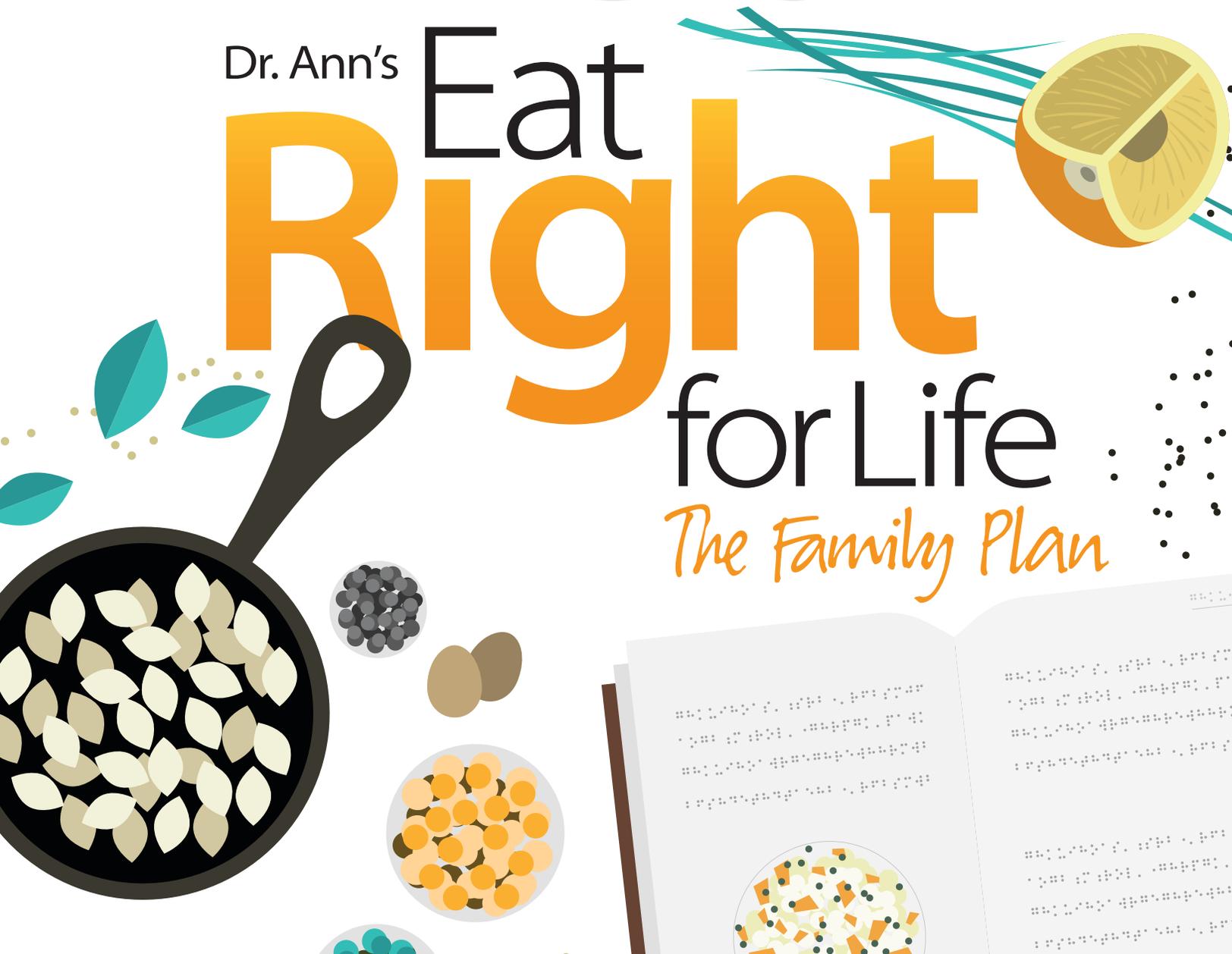


# ★ WELCOA's News & Views

## Dr. Ann's Eat Right for Life *The Family Plan*



A WELCOA Expert Interview with Dr. Ann Kulze

# ★WELCOA's News & Views

## Eat Right for Life: The Family Plan

An Expert Interview with  
**Dr. Ann G. Kulze**

### ABOUT **DR. ANN G. KULZE**



Ann G. Kulze, MD is a renowned authority and motivational speaker on nutrition, healthy living, and disease prevention. She received her undergraduate degree in Food Science and Human Nutrition from Clemson University and her medical degree from the Medical University of South Carolina, where she graduated as the Valedictorian of her class. With formal training in both nutrition and medicine, in addition to her extensive “hands on” experience as a wife, mother of four, and trusted family physician, she has distinguished herself as a one-of-a-kind “real world” nutrition and wellness expert. She is the founder and CEO of the wellness education firm, Just Wellness LLC, and author of several books including the award winning, best-selling Eat Right for Life® series.

When she’s not writing, researching, or motivating others through her speaking engagements, Dr. Ann lives her wellness message in her native Charleston, SC where she enjoys swimming, running, kayaking, cooking, gardening and spending time with her wonderful family. Learn more at [www.DrAnnWellness.com](http://www.DrAnnWellness.com).

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### ABOUT **RYAN PICARELLA, MS, SPHR**



As WELCOA’s President, Ryan brings immense knowledge and insight from his career that spans over a decade in the health and wellness industry. He is a national speaker, healthcare consultant, and has designed and executed award winning wellness programs. Known for his innovative and pragmatic approach to worksite wellness, Ryan looks forward to furthering the WELCOA mission and vision and continuing to position the organization for success for the future.

Ryan Picarella can be reached at [rpicarella@welcoa.org](mailto:rpicarella@welcoa.org).

**50%** of health care dollars are spent on employees' spouses and dependents; do you have a strategic plan for improving health for the whole family? WELCOA President, Ryan Picarella sits down with medical doctor and nutrition expert Dr. Ann Kulze to start a conversation about how to tackle this critical cost driver for organizations.



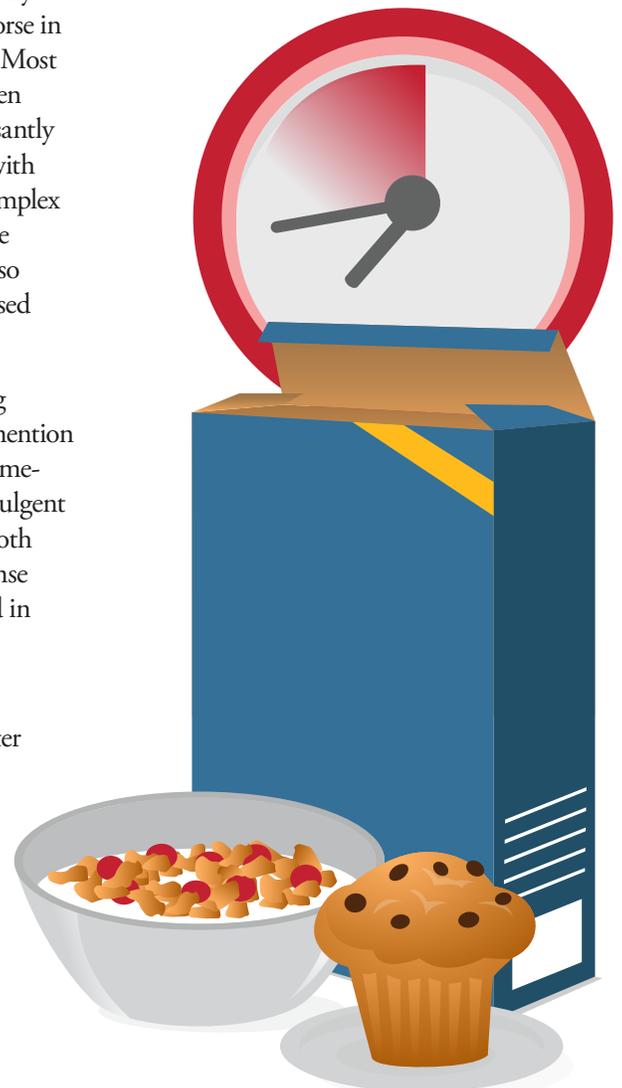
**Q1** What do you think has led to the decline in the quality of foods that our families eat?

**Dr. Ann Kulze:** Several things operating in concert. First and foremost is our truly toxic food culture. Over the past 40 years there have been epic changes for the worse in our food supply, which have ambushed all of us—even well-intentioned parents. Most notable has been the constant deluge of ultra-processed, nutritionally inferior, often high calorie, manufactured foods that are easy, convenient, ubiquitous and incessantly marketed to all of us from cradle to grave. Permissive agricultural policies along with an extraordinarily powerful, connected and highly centralized industrial food complex lies at the core of our noxious food environment. Super-slick, downright deceptive food packaging bearing wholesome and healthy accolades front and center has also understandably bamboozled many, particularly when it comes to dubious processed foods.

On top of this we have our frantic and time-pressed lifestyles. From dual working parents to over-scheduled kids to smart phones and other technologies—not to mention social media constantly competing for our attention—a never-ending sense of “time-famine” has become endemic in our culture. And in concert with our readily indulgent food culture, this demanding and frenzied, modern lifestyle is especially dicey. Both naturally reinforce the quick and easy route, which is often unhealthy, calorie-dense takeout, fast food or ready-to-eat packaged foods, which are almost always served in over-sized portions.

Compounding all of the above is a widespread lack of understanding of the huge impact dietary choices have on *everyone's* health and quality of life, as well as utter confusion over what constitutes a healthy diet. Diet-related chronic diseases are now epidemic and comprise the single greatest cause of adult morbidity and mortality, and have tragically become a growing menace in children. We have the data that clearly shows that dietary choices are one of the most powerful drivers, if not the most powerful driver of our health. People simply do not grasp this fact; much less leverage it for its wowing

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benefits. And because of media spin, popular “diet” books and over-zealous food marketing, many people are understandably totally muddled on the nutrition front. One recent survey noted that people considered doing their own personal taxes easier than knowing how to eat a healthy diet!

## Q2 How do we begin to feed our families healthier, more balanced meals?

**AK:** Step one is recognizing the overwhelming influence family and home-based eating practices have on everyone’s health—both now and in the future. Studies show that what we do at home, particularly for our kids, sets the bar for how we eat elsewhere. And for kids, we know that lifelong dietary habits are largely formed in youth. Honestly, I think for parents to fail to establish wholesome and healthy eating at home and to “live it too” is to squander one of the single greatest opportunities they have to ensure that their children reach their full potential for a long, healthy, vibrant and productive life. For families, what could be more important?

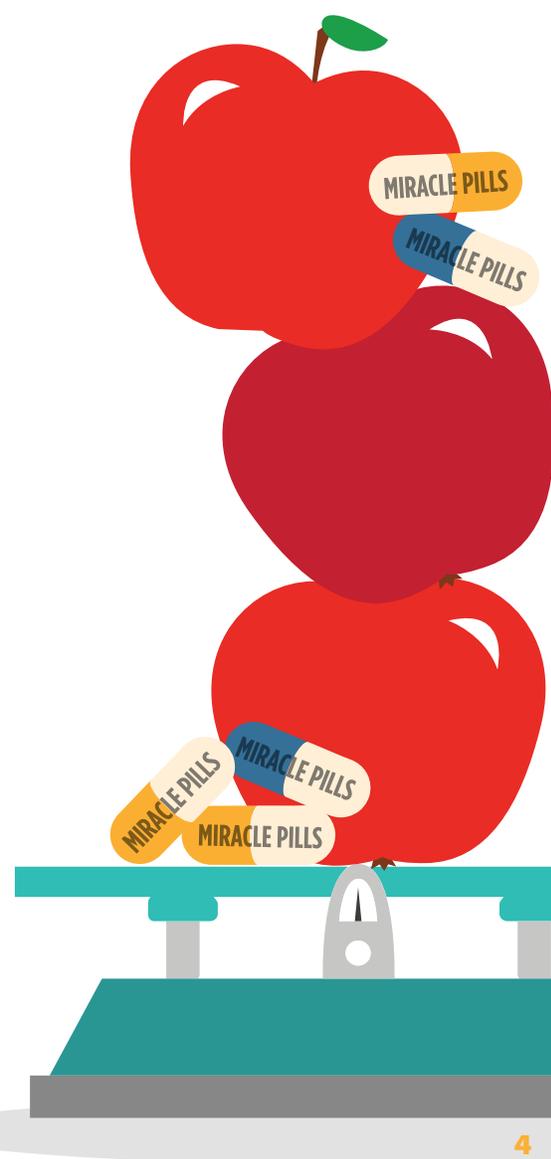
Step two is acquiring the fundamental knowledge to make healthy food choices, while avoiding unhealthy choices, or learning how to *eat right for life*.

Step three is equipping families, especially the household’s “nutritional gatekeeper,” with the skills and practices that will get healthy foods into their homes and ultimately into the mouths and bodies of both themselves and their loved ones.

## Q3 What about the never-ending deluge of new superfoods, miracle pills or “diets”? How do we cut through all the noise and start paying attention to what really matters, which is the healthiest way to eat?

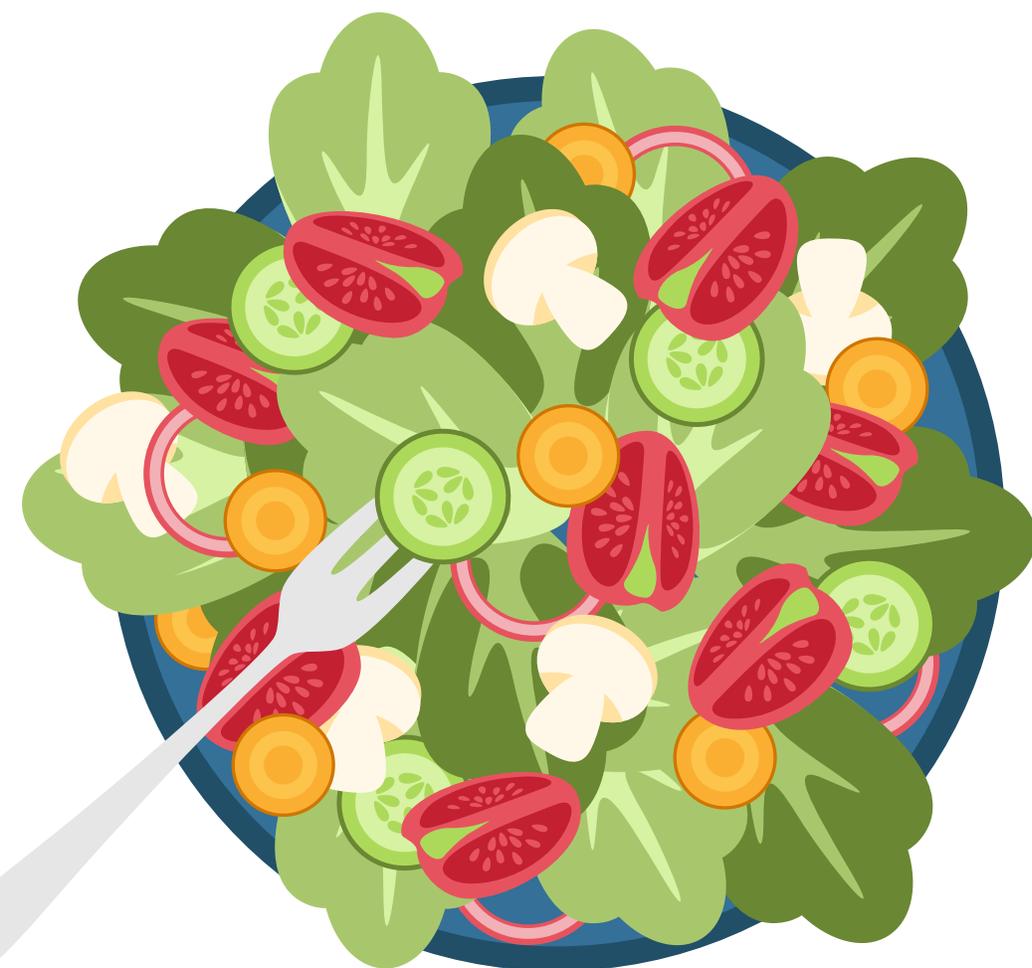
**AK:** Amen to that question! Between the often conflicting and twisted forces generated by the media and the in-your-face marketing of “miracle” supplements, “lose weight quick” schemes and “cure-all” foods de jour, people really are spinning—and understandably so.

Here are the basic dos and don’ts: Do not rely on the popular/mainstream media. It is disheartening, but a fact that even the most established and esteemed media outlets at times can get it wrong. Do not rely on lay “experts,” —models, Hollywood folks, celebrity personal trainers, etc. How in the heck could *they* really know the science? Do not rely on commercial entities that sell food and nutrition products. They are understandably biased. Do not be taken by any book, supplement, or food product that



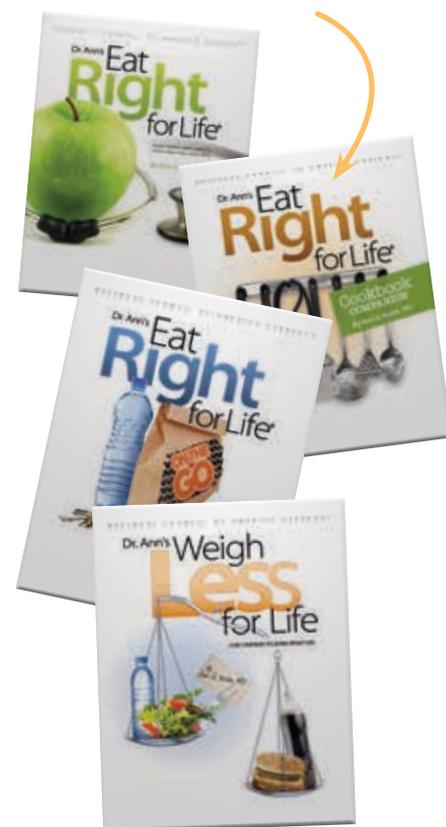
claims to be a quick fix or cure-all. This will *always* be a fantasy. Do not be duped by packaged, processed foods with health claims on their labels. These are almost always a dead-ringer giveaway that the food is not wholesome and healthy.

As for the dos, do get your dietary advice from credible, credentialed professionals *who are free from commercial ties*. These include MD's, PHD's, or RD's. Academic medical institutions, health-related professional associations or non-profit organizations (American Heart Association, American Cancer Society, etc.), and government-based health institutions (Center's for Disease Control, NIH etc.) are also reliable sources of evidenced-based nutrition guidance. Many of the best professional nutrition experts and most all of the reputable organizations have web-based content that is easy to access and often free. Many highly esteemed nutrition/medical professionals also offer excellent books for the lay audience. And for a really simple, yet highly reliable guide to consuming what an enormous body of science tells us *really* is the "healthiest diet," keep these two guiding principles in mind: 1. Eat real foods that are as close to their natural form as possible. In other words, stay away from processed, "industrial" foods. And 2. Eat an abundance of plant-based foods. It really is as basic as that. Thankfully, there are a broad array of eating styles that can fit nicely into this paradigm—from vegetarian to Mediterranean to omnivorous to others. The goal is simply to aim for the former two "essential ingredients" as the foundation of your diet.



Do not be duped by packaged, processed foods with health claims on their labels. These are almost always a **dead-ringer giveaway** that the food is not wholesome and healthy.

Check out Dr. Ann's entire nutrition series at WELCOA's eStore



➤ <http://www.welcoa.org/store/>

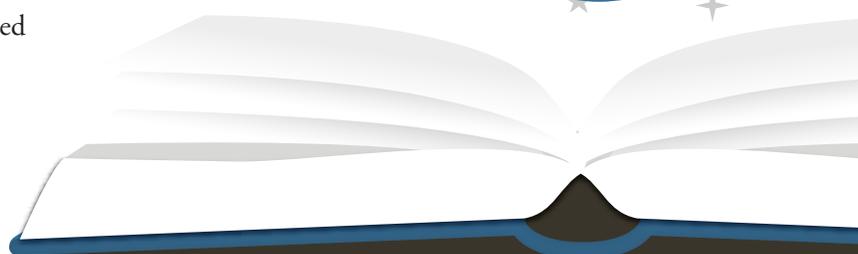
**Q4** In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges American families face when it comes to eating healthy? And how do we overcome them?

**AK:** As I touched on earlier, there are several. The failure to recognize the massive influence diet has on our own and our loved ones' current and future health and quality of life is primary. Many parents simply do not grasp the all-powerful role they play in putting their kids on the path to a brighter, happier, and more productive life both now and into adulthood simply by insuring that their kids eat a healthy diet. Additionally, many parents are naïve to the fact that diet-based diseases begin **in childhood**. We now know that obesity, heart disease, the entire family of metabolic diseases, osteoporosis, even the seeds for some cancers are often established in youth. Following along this same line, many parents are clueless when it comes to their own power. Hands down, the single most powerful thing a parent could do to raise a healthy child is to be a healthy role model. What I love about this fact is that it can become a very effective motivator and agent of change to improve the food and lifestyle choices of both grownups and their children. In other words, healthy families begin with healthy parents! I feel so strongly about this fact that if given the opportunity, I would passionately scream it out from rooftops with a megaphone.

Big challenge number two is the lack of basic nutrition knowledge in our families. Parents need to be educated on the fundamentals of healthy eating, such as how to stock their kitchens with the right foods, while keeping the wrong foods out. In a perfect world we would figure out a way for all parents, better yet the entire family, to complete a *Healthy Eating 101* course, which would include the nuts and bolts of eating right along with a simple step-by-step guide for making over their kitchen pantries and cupboards.

Big challenge number three, is “no time” in combination with stress. Families are busier and more frantic than ever. Exacerbating things further, there is also the false perception that healthy meals are costly and arduous to prepare. Here, we need to impress upon our families that healthy eating should be a priority for everyone because if we do not have our health, then **everything** is at risk. And on a much brighter note, healthy families have the most fun! Next, we need to make sure those “nutritional gatekeepers” of the home recognize that balanced and nutritious meals prepared from real foods really can be quick, easy and cost-effective to prepare. (Thank goodness!) I know because I did it for over twenty years as I worked full time and raised four very involved kids. In this regard, it would also be helpful to be sure parents were informed of the well-documented risks that come from dining out and consuming ready-made processed fare. Relative to home-cooked meals, studies clearly show that both offer more

We now know that obesity, heart disease, the entire family of metabolic diseases, osteoporosis, even the seeds for some cancers are **often established in youth.**”



calories, unhealthy fat, sugar and sodium, and less overall nutritional quality. Processed foods and dining out really are a menace to everyone's health! And on the flip side, there is now an overwhelming body of published science confirming that the wholesome tradition of family mealtimes can decisively improve the health and well being of the entire household. Frankly, I believe of all the things we could do to improve the collective health of American families, simply getting back to the dinner table would be utterly transformative.

**Q5** How to we get our families, especially our kids, to start making the right choices when it comes to food?

**AK:** Thankfully, we now have a fantastic body of very helpful science confirming the effectiveness of many of home-based practices that can dramatically improve the quality of everyone's dietary choices, especially our kids. In my latest book, I distilled them down to the "Ten Golden Guidelines" for parents. They include the following:

#### 1. BE A HEALTHY ROLE MODEL

As I already stressed, this is number one. In fact, being a healthy role model is the "Golden Rule" for raising a healthy child! This love-infused endeavor is also unmatched in the rewards that it can bring to parents. My four veggie-loving, junk food-free, fit and healthy kids are one of my proudest and most cherished accomplishments.

#### 2. MAKE SURE THE HOME IS A HAVEN FOR HEALTHY EATING

Having healthy foods readily available in the home, while limiting unhealthy options is second only to role modeling as the most pivotal practice for raising healthy eaters. Make the healthy choice the easy choice, or better yet, the only choice.

#### 3. SPEAK UP, BUT KEEP IT POSITIVE

Parents need to talk to their children regularly about the importance of healthy eating, and be sure to use language that is upbeat, positive, and couched in an age-appropriate context.

#### 4. SIT DOWN FOR FAMILY MEALS AS OFTEN AS POSSIBLE

I cannot stress this one enough. Oh the power of the family meal!

#### 5. LIMIT TV

Television viewing has emerged as the most powerful behavioral predictor of poor nutrition and obesity for everyone. Frequent advertisements for unhealthy foods are the primary culprit behind this indisputable link. Mindless munching in front of the tube and engaging in an excessively sedentary activity are additional fattening forces.

#### 6. LIMIT EXPOSURE TO PROCESSED, "ULTRA-PALATABLE" FOOD

There is now compelling evidence in both humans and animals that highly palatable foods, particularly sweets, directly stimulate the brain's reward centers, predisposing us to food cravings and disrupting normal appetite control mechanisms. Picky eating and even worse, aversions to healthy foods, can result when we regularly indulge in high-risk, ultra-palatable foods, particularly with our children. For best results, keep these foods out of the home. After all, if it is not there, it is not an option!

“There is now an overwhelming body of published science confirming that the **wholesome tradition of family mealtimes** can decisively **improve the health and well being** of the entire household.”



## 7. BE SURE EVERYONE EATS BREAKFAST, LUNCH, AND DINNER DAILY

For robust overall health, optimal energy, peak brain performance, and for kids' optimal growth and development, insure that everyone eats a healthy breakfast, lunch and dinner each day.

## 8. LIMIT SNACKING

Although there are many dietary drivers of the obesity epidemic, record levels of snacking on high calorie, nutritionally defunct fare is one of the most glaring. In America, it has now become culturally acceptable to eat anywhere and at any time, and we are doing it. The average American kid is munching between meals three times a day and the most commonly consumed snacks are dessert foods followed by salty snacks (chips, etc.), sugary beverages, then candy. Who has room for healthy family meals with so much snacking?

## 9. BE SURE AT LEAST ONE PARENT/ADULT IN THE HOUSEHOLD CAN COOK

I am going to cut right to the chase with this one. I think it is *virtually impossible* to maintain good health, especially for our kids, without regular access to home-prepared meals. Expert culinary skills are not required—basic kitchen proficiency will suffice.

## 10. CREATE A “CULTURE OF HEALTH” IN THE HOME

This Golden Guideline naturally flows from and should ultimately transcend all of the others. Thankfully, “culture” is one of the most powerful forces on the planet. If health is established as a core family value, a “culture of health” will eventually develop in the home. And what it can bring to our families in terms of happiness, success and a sense of peace is priceless. Hooray for health!

**Q6** Getting the family all on the same page when it comes to food can be a source of pain and frustration. How do we end the food fight and turn the tables?

**AK:** Of all the pleading requests I get from parents relative to kids and nutrition, hands down, the two most common are: “How do I get my picky eater to eat healthy foods?” and “How do I get my child to eat more vegetables?” Fortunately, a host of studies have been published over the past 15 years that have identified loads of easy-to-implement tactics that really do work. I know this because they worked for me—Two of my four started out with very finicky palates.

First however, I think it is important for parents to understand why most kids naturally “hate” Brussels sprouts, and many other veggies for that matter. It relates to two genetically hard-wired behavioral traits that are notably prominent in children. First is an instinctive aversion to bitter tastes (think veggies) and a contrasting affinity for sweet tastes (think cookies, ice cream etc.). The second is food “neophobia”, which is an innate fear of unfamiliar foods. Both offered a survival advantage during hunter-gatherer times. Bitter foods were more likely to be poisonous and lower in life-saving calories, while sweeter foods were typically safer and more calorically dense. Strange or new foods could be toxic or even deadly.

The average American kid is munching between meals **three times a day** and the most commonly consumed snacks are **dessert foods followed by salty snacks (chips, etc.), sugary beverages, then candy.**”

While there are many others, the best practices for defeating those defiant eaters and ending the food fight in the home include the following:

#### STIFLE THE COMPETITION

Parents need to be sure to keep their children's favorite junk foods away when trying to get them to taste a new food or a food they are not enthusiastic about.

#### GET THEM HUNGRY

Although I never restricted my kid's access to fruits or veggies, even close to dinnertime, it is wise to otherwise forbid or discourage snacking within two hours of mealtime. Hunger definitely makes those veggies go down easier.

#### LET THEM TAKE PART

Ideally at all stages—in the grocery store, preparing meals, setting the table and serving plates—parents should involve their children in all home-based, food-related activities. This practice empowers children and boosts their self-efficacy around food, while giving them a sense of “ownership” when it comes to their meals.

#### KEEP THINGS LIVELY, CREATIVE, AND AESTHETICALLY PLEASING

Kids are highly sensitive to the appearance and presentation of food. Parents can use this to their tactical advantage by presenting food in fun, unexpected, whimsical or at least more aesthetically pleasing ways. Vigilance in avoiding the most notorious food turnoffs—unripe, moldy, rotten, wrinkled, ugly, soggy, and boring is a worthy practice. Bruised or blemished fruits and vegetables are particularly offensive, especially to younger children.

#### CHILL OUT

Parents should never overtly pressure or become agitated when trying to get a child to eat an unfamiliar or disliked food. If they do, it will just heighten the child's innate fear response or loathing of the food and even worse, can lead to food aversions.

#### GO STEALTH

Although parents should certainly talk openly with their kids about the virtues of veggies, sneaking them in on the sly is fair game, and studies show it works. I consider this approach very smart, culinary creativity—not deception.

#### PLANT A HOME VEGETABLE GARDEN

Based on solid science supporting the effectiveness of this practice for enhancing children's vegetable consumption, along with a slew of additional benefits—I am *wildly* enthusiastic about home vegetable gardens. And you don't have to have a green thumb! I don't and I started one, and what it did for my family has been remarkable. Words simply cannot do it justice!



What is one thing people can start doing today?

**AK:** Love. Because love really is the life force that sustains all of us, there is no better place to start than right there. Let love for your family and the others important to you be what compels and sustains you in your journey to live a healthier life. The healthier you live, the more love you can give and the more you will receive in return.

Let love for your family and the others important to you be what compels and sustains you in your journey to live a healthier life. ”



Want to hear more from Dr. Ann? Tune into her webinar

***Eat Right for Life:  
The Family Plan***

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