

The Wellness Child Lifestyle, Part 2

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Part one of this two-part series addressed how many young families are living the high-stress life reflective of our Western culture. Poor nutrition, lack of rest, and days filled with one activity after another are the normal routine for children and their parents.

Why should a family chiropractor care about the lifestyles of families? As chiropractors, we acknowledge that there are three primary causes of subluxations: physical, mental/emotional, and chemical. By assessing the lifestyle of our child patients, we can gather useful information to guide teachable parents to make healthier choices for their children. Altering or eliminating unhealthy habits may also improve the "trigger" or "cause" of their child's subluxation, further improving that child's well-being.

Where can you begin? Journaling can play a very important role, by allowing parents (who are ultimately responsible for creating new habits) to become aware that their family may not have a healthy lifestyle. Writing down a child's week of nutrition, play activities, time spent watching TV/playing something electronic, and time spent sleeping reveals a great deal about what actually occurs in a week; more than an oral report, for sure.

Depending on your practice style and wellness interests, you might have the parents journal one specific area, or expand to many topics that may be influencing the health and well-being of their child.

Regarding nutrition, you may want to ask questions regarding frequency of meals and snacks (or lack of), quality of foods (fast, processed, etc), the source of foods (organic vs. canned), quantity of food (percentage of vegetables, fruits, proteins, dairy, etc), consumption of allergy-inducing foods (dairy, wheat, soy, peanuts, corn), use of stimulants (sugar, caffeine, etc), fluid intake (water vs. other sources) and brand names of supplements taken.

How the child spends his or her time may give you a clue as to whether the family has a balanced life. For example, look at the amount of time spent watching television (family room vs. bedroom); playing computer games, and where they are played; playing unorganized sports or activities outside; reading or studying; talking on the phone; and traveling in a car or bus. Also determine the child's daily quiet time.

Sleep behavior is important, and finding out how children spend one-third of their lives is worthwhile. Check on the amount and quality (great to poor) of sleep; the quality of the child's mattress and pillow; the position they sleep in (stomach, back, etc); what time they go to bed and rise; and how much they play computer games or watch television prior to bedtime.

How the family spends time together as a unit may also provide a glimpse into healthy or unhealthy habits. Questions to ask regarding the family as a unit might be: How much time do the parents participate in physical activity with their child (walking, biking, playground, etc)? How many meals do they share together each day, throughout the week and weekend; Is the television on during mealtime? How many times does the family eat takeout or order-in fast food each week? Does the

family have a game or movie night, or a "no television or computer day" during the week?

And finally, is the child under any unusual stress from school, sports, peer pressure, or the home (siblings or divorce), and is the stress short or long term?

Once the parents submit their lifestyle journal, take time to review how the family and child live; don't be shocked to see a lifestyle that is out of balance. During your review process, create a strategy for parents that will allow them the opportunity to slowly implement your recommendations. Outline a 30-60-90-day plan; parents will be more likely to succeed by implementing "baby steps" rather than "giant" requests.

Remember that the recommendations you are making might mean that the entire family may have to change their lifestyle for the better. Although one might consider this process time-consuming, the family chiropractor can see this as an opportunity to touch a family beyond the adjustment, reaching out and introducing a family to the wellness lifestyle.

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JULY 2005