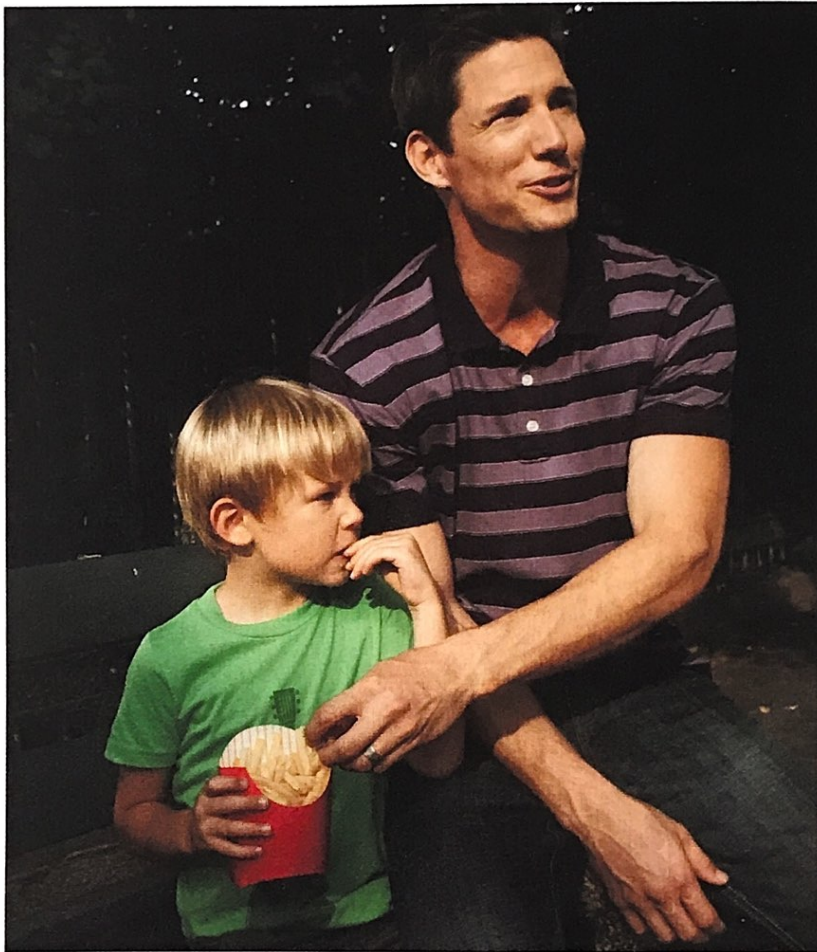


BY MAURA RHODES

The Parent Fat Traps



TEMPTED BY HIS TATERS? You may end up packing on some unwanted pounds.

Having kids is wonderful, fulfilling, glorious—and fattening. Here are nine ways the pounds can sneak up on you, and how to fight 'em off.

Fat Trap No. 1 You polish off your kid's fries/scrape the last spoonful of chocolate pudding/lick the peanut butter off the knife.

SKINNY SOLUTIONS

Don't overload your child. In one sitting a typical toddler will eat just one-quarter to one-half the amount of food a grown-up will. If you keep servings age appropriate, that means fewer leftovers for you to pig out on. Your kid can always ask for seconds.
Graze on grown-up goodies. If you feed the

kids separately (because who wants dinner at 5 p.m.?), have something healthy and filling to munch on while they eat, like a handful of almonds, hummus and baked pita chips, or edamame (in the pods, so you have to take time to pop 'em out). Bonus: All of these snacks are high in the monounsaturated fats that help melt belly flab.

Waste not. A triangle of PB&J, a couple of untouched chicken nuggets, even a handful of veggie chips can be saved for your kid's snack the next day. Serve with fruit and some milk or yogurt, says Lisa Drayer, R.D., a *Women's Health* nutrition advisor.

Fat Trap No. 2 You are sleep-deprived beyond belief. Study after study has turned up a link between too little sleep (typically fewer than seven or eight hours) and obesity.

SKINNY SOLUTIONS

Screw the laundry. Get to bed. You can fold towels/unload the dishwasher/catch up on *True Blood*/pay bills tomorrow.

Indulge in a daytime siesta. A 20-minute nap can give you an energy boost, Drayer says—and besides, she adds, "If you're snoozing, you can't be eating!"

Graze. On days you know that you'll be up for at least 18 hours straight, try to eat six mini meals (one every three hours) rather than three big meals. It'll keep your energy up and stoke your metabolism so that your body's burning calories constantly.

Fat Trap No. 3 You cook to please your tot's picky palate—which means a regular diet of starch plus dairy (mac 'n' cheese, grilled cheese, cheese pizza...).

they can succeed, not fail. You don't send Hillary Clinton out to win a pie-baking contest, and you don't ask Rachael Ray to fix the Middle East. And in the same way, you don't send Dad out on any mission that involves juggling several intricate, delicate, and emotionally tricky situations. Most dads are way less good at assignments that require attention to detail than they are at tasks that require enthusiasm and physical vitality. So encourage him to provide the muscle. Let Dad be male, simple and strong, and outdoorsy and sporty. Yes, of course, these are gender clichés, but they're also useful to keep in mind. He's not their mother. Encourage him to be their dad.

Don't make Dad your assistant

Not long ago, all parents had to do was make a few sandwiches and drive the kids to Little League practice now and then. Not anymore. Now, raising kids is an extreme sport, a logistical challenge that would have tested the fellas who planned the Apollo space mission. Today's kids are tightly—and yes, sometimes overly—scheduled. And often, because women tend—that's *tend*—to be better at organizational stuff, Mom becomes the boss, and Dad is sort of reduced to her assistant, a functionary who takes orders and drives people places. In too many families, Mom calls the shots.

This is bad for Dad's morale, even if he doesn't know it. And more important, it's bad for the kids. They're entitled to two functioning, effective parents. So even if Dad is happy to become your lackey—and some guys are because it's just easier to follow orders—don't let him. Either make all decisions together, or else be sure that Dad takes responsibility and decision-making authority in a couple of areas that suit him well. Now of course, this means you'll have to live with his decisions—even the bad ones. But parents have to *show confidence* in each other, even if they don't feel it. *Especially* if they don't feel it.

Respect Dad's need for downtime—and yours

People need a little downtime each day—not much, just 15, maybe 20 minutes in which to do nothing more taxing than read a magazine or tool around Facebook or stare idly into space. If they don't get it, neurons get tangled up and low-grade rage ensues. Now this fact runs head-on into the perpetual demands of being a modern parent. There's always something that *could* be done—washing dishes, helping with homework, search-



ing the ductwork for the hamsters. But most often, only dads are smart enough to *demand* the mini-vacation that parents of both genders need. Moms frequently feel guilty about goofing off, even momentarily, and so they make Dad feel guilty too. Bad idea. He's right about this one, Mom. You don't owe your kids your every breath of every day. Resist the media blitz that insists you're somehow failing your kids—either you're not feeding them right, or you're not enriching their minds enough, or whatever. Your kids deserve a mother who's proud of what she's done, not anxious about what she hasn't. So support Dad's need for a little downtime, and get some for yourself as well. It's not just good for parents, but it's good for children, too. They should learn to enrich their *own* lives.

Do Dad—as often as you'd like

The single most helpful thing you can do to help your guy be a better father is to keep your sex life going through the parenting years. When Dad loses a physical connection to Mom, despair sets in. And it's tough to be an engaged father when life tastes like ashes. I know that the exhaustion and midnight crying squalls and the anxieties of raising kids are not exactly a formula for keening lust. But if you care about your children, make this a priority. The kids deserve a dad who has some hope in his heart. A well-loved dad is a devoted dad. Do him for the children.

Now, of course, you don't want to be so accommodating to the narrowness of Dad's skill set, so respectful of his limitations, that fatherhood isn't an opportunity for growth. Fatherhood is a fabulous forum for a guy to expand his portfolio. So you want him to stretch some, but you also want him to feel well cast in the Dad role. Like anything artful, bringing forth the über-Dad within is about finding a just-right balance. If he feels that his innate energies are useful to you and the kids, a serenity will inspire him to happy heights of Dad mirth and love. And years from now, the children will look back and remember *two* parents who savored family life and loved them with everything they had. And once the kids are grown and flown, you'll have a husband at peace, a man proud of his contributions to the cause. ☞

HOW TO PREP HIS DUTY ROSTER

Don't try to jam a square dad into a round role

When divvying up kid-care gigs, keep his strengths and weaknesses in mind. Greenlight male-friendly missions, but be cautious about tasking him to muck around in minutiae.

Go easy on the arts.

It's a puzzle that we're dexterous tying fishing flies and ham-handed when it comes to third-grade raft-building projects, but there the fact is. So don't assign Dad to anything involving glitter or glue, or French words like *papier-mâché* and *collage*. This caution extends to oversight of Halloween costumery too.

Encourage the tumble.

Support hiking, running, biking, camping, wrestling, all sorts of horsing around. Sure, moms should do this, too. But it's a job particularly well suited to papa.

Remember, he's not you.

The boom in sports opps for girls has given dads and daughters a connection that used to be a guy thing only. But be careful not to urge Dad into gender territory where (1) he doesn't want to be and (2) your daughter doesn't really want him. Once a girl is 8 or so, she doesn't want Dad taking her on shopping trips or talking

her through social troubles in school. Girls are inspired by the otherness of their father. Parents aren't entirely interchangeable.

Simplify instructions.

Be concise, and always lead with the punch line: as in "Pick Janey and Jill up at the middle school at 4." Don't bury the central idea in a slew of preliminaries and asides and the thousands of extra words that short-circuit fathers' brains. Consider writing things down, even if he objects to it. No, check that, especially if he objects to it. —H.O.

SKINNY SOLUTIONS

Get rough(age): Use whole-wheat pasta, whole-grain breads, brown rice: They have more fiber, which speeds weight loss by binding with other foods and escorting them out of the body. It also helps you feel full longer. **Be a cheese whiz.** Opt for fat-free or low-fat in sandwiches, on burgers, in mac 'n' cheese. **Go halvesies.** Make two versions of a dish—one they'll eat, and one you'll like. Serve your grilled chicken on a bed of steamed spinach; the kids can have theirs sliced with baby carrots and honey mustard for dipping. Or pimp your pasta with lots of veggies.

Fat Trap No. 4 All your local take-out joints are on speed dial—it's pizza or Chinese (or Mexican or Thai) at least a couple nights a week.

SKINNY SOLUTIONS

Play pat-a-pie. That oil slick on top of your pizza isn't a complimentary topping. Blot off the extra fat and calories with a paper towel. **Order smart.** A thin-crust pizza has one gram less fat and 40 fewer calories per slice than a deep-dish pie; a side salad with that pizza will make it easier to stick to just one piece; veggie versions of just about anything, from burritos to dumplings, will be lower in calories and higher in nutrients and fiber. **Get steamed.** Order your Chinese or Thai entrées steamed, with the sauce on the side, says Tracy Olgeaty Gensler, R.D., a nutritionist in Chevy Chase, Maryland. **Unload it.** Dump oily or mayo-heavy salads into a colander to drain off excess dressing.

Fat Trap No. 5 You eat out a lot—most often at places that have a mascot and pass out crayons with the menu.

SKINNY SOLUTIONS

Google before you go. Kid-friendly restaurants have some of the most fat- and calorie-laden menus around. Preview the offerings on the restaurant's website and decide what to order prior to loading up the minivan and heading out. **Research on the run.** If you have an iPhone, \$2.99 will buy you the Fast Food Calorie Counter app, with nutrition info for more than 60 national chains. Or stash a copy of *Eat This, Not That!* in your diaper bag. **Be the first to order.** That way you won't be tempted to can your grilled fish plan when you hear someone ask for the cheese fries. **Know your fat-food vocab.** Let your eyes cruise on by anything that's "crispy," "creamy," or "buttery" (not to mention

served with aioli, béarnaise, or alfredo sauce).

Skip the entrées. Opt for two appetizers, Drayer says—one protein-based, one veggie-based (grilled chicken skewers and a salad, say, or shrimp cocktail and roasted vegetables).

Fat Trap No. 6 You're on the soccer mom (or mall rat) diet: constantly caught empty-bellied and forced to succumb to the snack stand or food court.

A recent study in the journal *Obesity* found that dieters consumed an average of 36 percent of their weekly calories on Saturdays.

SKINNY SOLUTIONS

Be prepared! Keep a stash of snacks on hand: a mix of almonds and dried apricots in a mini plastic bag, Drayer suggests, or an energy bar with less than 200 calories.

Walk. Fast. Along the sidelines at the soccer game, or from Baby Gap to Sephora.

Go for the lesser food-court evils. If you find yourself peckish and snackless, hold your breath as you go past Cinnabon and head for one of these less egregious options, Gensler says: at Auntie Anne's, a plain pretzel with no butter; at Dunkin' Donuts, the Egg-White Turkey Sausage Flatbread sandwich; a slice of thin-crust pizza and a salad from Sbarro; Mickey D's Fruit and Yogurt Parfait; two Fresco Crunchy Tacos from Taco Bell.

Fat Trap No. 7 You barely have time to take a shower in the morning, much less shovel down breakfast. If you regularly skip your a.m. meal, you might as well send excess pounds an engraved invitation to take up residence on your butt. Researchers know that morning fasters are more likely to be fat than morning eaters.

SKINNY SOLUTIONS

Eat. Hey, it doesn't have to be an elaborate sit-down affair. You wouldn't be the first mom to bring an energy bar into the bathroom while you put on your makeup.

Prep in the p.m. Fill your cereal bowl (the kids' too) in the evening and cover with plastic wrap. The next morning all you have to do is add milk. Or make yourself a peanut butter

Stealthy Fat Attack

Here's how nibbling from your kid's plate can add up—and remember, all it takes is 50 extra calories a day to put on five pounds in a year.

1 bite of a PB&J
47 calories

1 chicken nugget
46 calories

½ small order of fast-food fries
115 calories

2 spoonfuls of chocolate pudding
46 calories

3 spoonfuls of Kraft macaroni and cheese
82 calories

½ of a hot dog in a bun
134 calories

2 big swigs of 2% chocolate milk
47 calories

sandwich with sliced banana while you make school lunches at night.

Have some egg with that toast. Or peanut butter with that bagel half. An all-carb (or very low-carb) diet will increase your carb craving and slow your metabolism, research has found, so be sure your morning meal includes a lean protein.

Suck down some moo. A new study in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* advises: Drink skim milk instead of fruit juice at breakfast and you'll feel full longer and be less likely to overindulge when lunchtime comes.

Fat Trap No. 8 Your grocery store cart runneth over with junk.

SKINNY SOLUTIONS

Make a list and stick to it. Period. Include one treat per trip, Drayer suggests. **Don't shop when hungry.**

You're more likely to buy fattening crap.

Peruse the periphery. That's where you'll find produce, dairy foods, lean meats, and fish.

The stuff in the middle is mostly highly processed (read: packed with calories and salt).

Shop online. The store employee who puts together your order will not toss in a bag of Chips Ahoy! unless it's on your list.

Fat Trap No. 9 Your pantry is stocked with kid-pleasers like cookies, chips, and soda.

SKINNY SOLUTIONS

Stash that stuff where you can't see it. "Out of sight, out of mind" really works.

Keep your own treats. If you know you have a little something special hidden behind the spices or the frozen peas, you won't be as tempted to dig into the kids' Doritos. Limit decadent calories to around 150 a day, Drayer says: for example, seven Hershey's kisses (choose dark chocolate, for its cocoa flavanols); ¾ cup of Edy's Slow-Churned Butter Pecan ice cream; or a single serving bag of Baked! Lay's potato crisps.

Back off the bubbly. New research from Johns Hopkins University says you can lose more weight by cutting out just one can of soda per day than by cutting out an equal number of calories from food. That's a good trade-off. ❧