

Create a Legacy of Health and Fitness

By Bruce Burke

Over the last 30 years, we have been made acutely aware of the fact that regular exercise and good nutrition can have a significant effect on our lives. Despite this knowledge, as a culture we are still headed in the wrong direction, particularly when we look at statistics relating to children's health. For example, consider the following facts:

- One out of three children is considered obese.
- One in twelve people currently has diabetes; for those born in or after 2000, one in three will develop diabetes.

Most of us know what we need to do when it comes to nutrition and exercise: eat healthful foods and engage in regular physical activity. For those of us who don't, there are plenty of resources available. Why, then, are these alarming statistics moving in the wrong direction? It seems that our culture's changing priorities and new technologies have helped to create an "obesogenic environment" that lends itself to poor lifestyle decisions and, ultimately, to poor health. What will it take to motivate us to take personal responsibility for our exercise and nutrition choices? Instead of attempting to motivate ourselves through short bursts of vanity or doctor's orders, we should consider creating something more powerful: a long-term vision for ourselves and our families that is built to last.

Many of us would sacrifice anything to increase our children's chances to be healthy, even though we put our own health priorities on the back burner. But it has obviously done little good for parents and educators to preach healthy lifestyle habits that they rarely practice themselves. What could be more powerful than making a decision to *model* a healthy lifestyle, creating a legacy of health and fitness for our children and grandchildren? Viewing health decisions in the context of our larger lives (and the lives of our families) may be the motivation we need to take personal responsibility and put ourselves on the front line of battling this epidemic of poor health practices.

Having a clear vision of who you want to be, how you want to be perceived, and what you hope your legacy to be can strongly influence your daily-decision making process. People who are successful at practicing healthy lifestyle habits focus on the choices they have available to them each day and how those choices may connect to long-term goals. Those who are unsuccessful tend to focus only on their immediate circumstances and the reasons it seems they *can't* succeed.

Once you have made a decision to create a legacy of health by modeling good practices, you must create a strategy to do it. As you develop this strategy, remember to *focus on the process, not the result*. It is the process that you have total control of each hour of every day. The results will take care of themselves. As you get started, set yourself up for success by starting small. Less is more when it comes to starting an intelligent nutrition and exercise program. Too often, we set ourselves up for failure by creating grandiose or unsustainable strategies, or by getting discouraged when we don't see results as quickly as we had hoped.

Once you have started, success and failure should be measured by only one thing...*consistency*. Whatever you choose to do, whether it be as simple as walking to work each day or asking for no cheese in your omelet, *you must do it consistently*. Success breeds success. As you begin to enjoy the fruits of these new habits, you will often find yourself motivated to try something new. Who knows where it might lead!

Remember to put first things first. If your family's good health is important to you, be certain that your daily decision-making reflects that priority. Modeling good health practices is the best way to create a positive legacy for you and your family that will endure for generations.