

# Cleaning Up My Family's Diet

## The Journey of a Normal American Mom

By: Dottie Beck

 **Dan's Essentials**  
WHOLE FOOD PANTRIES FOR LIFE

I grew up in a normal, middle class, suburban environment. I was raised on Pop Tarts, peanut butter & jelly sandwiches, and Hamburger Helper. Weekends included chocolate chip pancakes for breakfast and pizza for dinner. Does this sound familiar to anyone else? As a slightly overweight and moderately teased adolescent who ate exactly what my skinny friends did, it was hard for me to understand why I was always the "chubby" one. I played sports and rode my bike all over my sub-division. I never got into video games and was outside being adventurous most of the day. Junior high (or middle school as some call it) was when the weight started affecting my social life. I never made the cheer leading squad, boys started making comments about my larger areas, and I was not accepted in certain groups.

In an effort to not let this happen in high school, I started working out. I took walks before school with my mom and did Jane Fonda step aerobics often. I became such a fitness nut that I actually taught step aerobics to my fellow peers in PE class. I felt better, but still didn't know that eating a Taco Bell bean burrito and chicken soft taco during off-campus lunch was making an impact on my appearance, my weight, and my emotions. In college, I took a course on nutrition that was taught by a registered dietician. I remember her telling us that we needed 8 glasses of water a day but that Diet Coke could be substituted if we didn't want to always drink water. She also went on to tell us that the only "bad" part of the cake was the frosting. Really?

Fast forward now to being married with four children and feeding them based on my upbringing and college nutrition course... Ugh!

Luckily, my career pointed me in a direction that began to open my eyes and redirect me to a healthier lifestyle. Although fruits and veggies had become a much larger part of our diets, consuming refined foods was still a staple in my family, and we certainly weren't eating great proteins or getting good fats.

After numerous conversations with my husband about the urgent need to make changes in the foods we were consuming, our journey began. Deciding how to remove processed sugar and foods with chemicals or other unnecessary non-nutrients was (and is) a difficult task. We have been taking baby steps over the last several months to remove these toxins from our pantry and our bodies,

and it is making a difference! Now we're taking the 40-30-30 approach (40% carbs, 30% protein, and 30% fat) to our diet.

I decided to start with protein. We all need it in our diets and do not get nearly enough of the good kind. Rather than buying whatever meat is on sale at the deli, we are now cooking with organic, grass fed beef and free range organic poultry, including eggs. How foods are grown or raised plays an impact on our health and our environment. Organic foods are free from pesticides, GMO's, and harmful fertilizers (all stuff we absolutely don't need to consume), so whenever we can get organic, we do!

The next thing to do was to remove pasta and other refined carbohydrates- a big hurdle especially when growing up with an Italian father! Instead, we now eat legumes and occasional brown rice as small sides at dinner. I wasn't sure how that was going to fly, but so far, so good! We soak our legumes prior to eating as well. Soaking softens skins and begins the sprouting process, which eliminates phytic acid and makes more minerals available. Soaking (which is easy to do and extremely beneficial) also improves digestibility, because the gas-causing enzymes and trisaccharides in legumes are released into the soaked water.

For good fats, I replaced good old Pam spray with cold-pressed extra virgin olive oil or coconut oil. When making smoothies, I pour a shot of flax seed oil in the blender, and they (my picky kids) don't even know it. Flax seed oil contains omega 3 fatty acids (ALA), which help reduce inflammation. Flax seed oil can act as a laxative and can be used for constipation and weight loss. It is also known to help with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Most people don't get enough Omega 3 fatty acids, which is why it's important to supplement with flax seed oil.

Finally, onto sugar... I used to bake on weekends and try new chocolate recipes I'd find on my friends baking blog. The kids were slightly discouraged at first when I gave it up. Not all my baking was given the thumbs up anyway, so there wasn't a ton of love lost! Recipes do exist for clean eating desserts, and hopefully one day I will master those, but for now, I have more time to play with my kids on weekends and enjoy my healthy little creatures. We have started using honey as a sweetener, which tastes great and has several benefits. Honey contains flavonoids, which are antioxidants



that help reduce the risk of some cancers and heart disease. Honey is also said to be useful in improving eyesight and for weight loss. Honey increases athletic performance by stabilizing glycogen levels and improving recovery time, helps regulating blood sugar and aids in maintaining beautiful skin! Additionally, items made with high fructose corn syrup (grocery store peanut butter and jelly) have been replaced with organic, unsweetened versions of the same thing, including PFC peanut butter! We still make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches occasionally, but use sprouted bread in place of Butternut.

At the dinner table, the kids have learned to relax while eating, chew their food, and enjoy their meals. There is no more sitting in front of the television or standing over the counter while eating for us. Most people don't realize how important it is to chew our food even though our grandma always made sure we did it. Chewing helps break down food for easier stomach digestion and the absorption of nutrients into the blood-stream. If we don't chew or eat in a parasympathetic (relaxed) state, a multitude of digestion issues can occur.

For my family, transitioning to a 40-30-30 lifestyle plan is definitely a work in progress, but we can all see and feel the benefits of eating nutrient-dense foods. For me, I know that I'm changing our lives, one nutrient at a time.

### **Eat well and remember, you are what your food eats!**

*Dottie Beck is a fitness and nutrition enthusiast who has been certified in personal training and group fitness. She studied nutrition at Harper College and DePaul University and is currently studying nutritional therapy. She is set to graduate October 2013 as a certified Nutritional Therapy Practitioner.*

[dbeck@performancefoodcenters.com](mailto:dbeck@performancefoodcenters.com)  
[www.dansessentials.com](http://www.dansessentials.com)