

7 Simple Steps for Healthier Families



Hi...

Thanks so much for taking the time to read WellnessMama.com. If we haven't met, my name is Katie and I'm a wife, mom of 5, amateur chef, real food crusader, scuba diver and (healthy) coffee addict who can finally do a pull-up (according to my twitter bio).

Why Wellness Mama?

When my first child was a few weeks old, I was sitting at my doctor's office for my follow-up appointment and nursing my baby as I waited to go in. I was reading a magazine at the time (wish I remembered the name) that said that the current generation would be the first to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents.

I looked down at my tiny newborn who was peacefully nursing and decided that statistics like those were not good enough! Not good enough for my kids.. not good enough for yours... not good enough for a whole generation.

That moment was when my mission to change health statistics like those began. I realized, as a mom, that the only people with the power to actually make these changes are moms. We are intimately connected to the next generation... We feed them, teach them, nurture them and it is up to us to improve things for them.

My goal is to provide my family with the healthiest foods and lifestyle possible and help you do the same. My pursuit of health for my family has led me to some conclusions that go against the grain – pun intended. This blog is a fusion of my passions for my family, for health and for fun. I attempt to combine science, common sense and humor to explain the pillars of my “Wellness Mama” lifestyle.

I hope that WellnessMama.com will be a valuable resource for you and your family. I'd love to meet you on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or [Google+](#) or see you around the blog.

This Quick Start Guide contains the Seven Simple Steps I wish I'd known when my family started working to improve our nutrition and health and I hope it is helpful to you. These steps are simple, but they certainly aren't always easy! For me, stress and sleep are two that I struggle with continually but I am gratefully making progress with these!



Thanks again for reading!

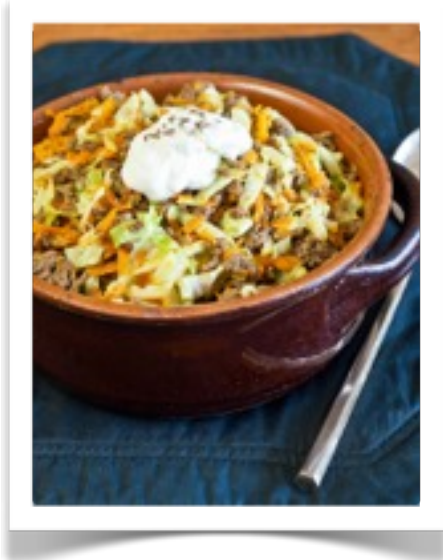
Warmly,

Katie

P.S. The links in this guide are affiliate links. I receive a small commission and the cost is the same for you. Should you use these links, thank you so much for helping me keep WellnessMama.com up and running! :-)

Simple Step #1 - Eat More of the Good Stuff

I've found that it is never good to focus on the negative, especially when trying to make dietary changes. This seems to make will-power harder (we always want what we can't have) and it is focusing on the wrong thing.



Instead, I try to focus on the positives and on the benefits of eating real, whole foods. It isn't about simply avoiding the processed foods, but about choosing foods that nourish our bodies.

Especially in the early stages of making a dietary change, it can often be less daunting not to think about removing certain foods completely or permanently, but just to focus first on starting to incorporate and learn to like healthy options.

I've included a free week of meal plans and a shopping list at the end of this guide, but the basics are:

•Avoid processed foods and choose healthier options:

As a general guideline, foods in the middle of the store are typically not as healthy as foods around the outside of the store like produce and meats.

- **Cook at home when possible:** This alone is an easy way to make sure you are consuming healthier foods.
- **Add more veggies:** Let the kids go shopping with you and choose some new veggies to try. Make it a point to add an extra veggie to two of your meals each day. You'll up the nutrition and you might find some new favorites. Kids not on board? [Check out this post about how I help my kids learn to like healthy foods.](#)
- **Get Enough Protein and Fat:** Proteins and fats promote a feeling of satiety and help you feel full for longer. They also have more nutrients calorie for calorie and are important for growing children and for hormone health.
- **Limit the Sugar:** The body has no need for sugar, especially processed sugars. The carbohydrates the body does need can easily be obtained from starchy veggies and fruits. Conversely, sugar can have dozens of negative effects on the body and is best limited or avoided.
- **Coconut Oil:** You'll get tired of hearing me say it, but adding coconut oil to your diet is an easy way to add in the right kind of fats. Coconut oil is great for cooking and can also be used in natural beauty recipes, with pets, in smoothies, in homemade toothpaste and much more! **[This is the brand that we use- click here.](#)**

Simple Step #2 - Drink Clean Water

It's easy to focus on food when switching to a healthier lifestyle, but other factors can be just as important or more important.

One of these often-overlooked factors is water. In the developed world, we often assume that because our water is sanitized and filtered, it is clean. While we may not have bacteria and parasites in our water, it can still be home to chemicals and harmful components.



If you are drinking tap water, your water can be home to 300+ chemicals and pollutants, according to research from the Environmental Working Group. Among these contaminants are:

- **Volatile Organic Chemicals (VOCs)** such as pesticides, herbicides and other chemicals. These chemicals are found in most municipal water sources and even in well and other sources due to agricultural run-off and contamination. Research links certain VOCs to damage in the reproductive system, liver, kidneys and more.
- **Heavy Metals** like lead and mercury are found in some water sources and have been linked to any health problems.
- **Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals** are chemicals that may mimic or interfere with the normal hormones in the body and these chemicals are being found in increasing amounts in the water supply. From this testimony before a congressional committee on the issue: "Over the past fifty years, researchers observed increases in endocrine-sensitive health outcomes. Breast and prostatic cancer incidence increased between 1969 and 1986 ; there was a four-fold increase in ectopic pregnancies (development of the fertilized egg outside of the uterus) in the U.S. between 1970 and 1987 ; the incidence of cryptorchidism (undescended testicles) doubled in the U.K. between 1960 and the mid 1980s ; and there was an approximately 42% decrease in sperm count worldwide between 1940 and 1990 ." These chemicals are known to affect animals when they enter the water supply as well.
- **Fluoride:** This is perhaps the most controversial of the contaminants in water (if something like water contaminants can be controversial!) because it is purposefully added to the water and there is much heated debate about the benefits/harm of this. If fluoride has any benefit, it would be directly to the teeth, as drinking the fluoride has not been statistically shown to increase oral health at all. Additionally, fluoride has been linked to thyroid problems and other disorders when consumed internally.

I've talked about water quality and water filters in the past and ranked the best options (again don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good. If a good water filter isn't a possibility for you right now, just do the best you can with what you have and make sure you are drinking water!):

Bottled Water:

Bottled water has started falling out of favor lately and with good reason. Mark's Daily Apple did an in-depth analysis of why, but bottled water is not a good option for several reasons:



Chemicals from the plastic bottle itself can leach into the water
In most cases, the water itself is no different than tap water
Bottled water costs more in many cases than drinking tap water
Water bottles are a major source of consumer waste each year!
Verdict: Not the best option on price, taste, or health so I skip it. That being said, having a bottle of water is very convenient, and there are some great sustainable options. Glass and steel water bottles are my personal favorites!

Pitcher Water Filters

Pitcher water filters like Brita use Granulated Activated Charcoal to remove some contaminants. They are less expensive than other filter options upfront, but require frequent filling (especially for large families) and cartridge replacement (making them more expensive in the long run). Since the carbon is not solid, it does not remove all toxins though these filters will improve taste.

Pitcher filters will reduce chlorine, but are not effective at removing VOCs, heavy metals, endocrine disruptors or fluoride. This category also includes faucet mount external filters, which use the same technology.

Verdict: Better than nothing, but doesn't remove the worst offenders and is somewhat costly to use compared to other options.

Reverse Osmosis (RO)

Reverse Osmosis filtration uses a membrane which removes many contaminants from water. It is usually paired with a Granulated Activated Charcoal filter to remove chlorine and many mount under the sink and have a holding tank. The semipermeable membrane separates many contaminants (which usually have a larger particle size than water) from the water and rejects a large amount of water in the process.

The result is a waste of several gallons of water for every gallon filtered and many naturally occurring minerals (including calcium and magnesium) are also removed from the water. We used this type of filter for a long time but added trace minerals back in to the water to replace the ones that are filtered out. It does remove a large amount of contaminants but is not the best option, in my opinion.

Pros: Removes a large amount of contaminants. Many units are stored under the sink and have a simple spigot over the counter for getting the water. Does reduce arsenic, asbestos and heavy metals. Does remove fluoride.

Cons: Wastes more water than it produces. Does not reduce VOCs or endocrine disruptors. Requires adequate water pressure to work so it is not usable if home water supply is cut off.

Takes up to an hour to filter one gallon of water and filters need to be replaced regularly.
Removes necessary minerals from the water.

Verdict: Certainly better than a lot of options out there and does remove fluoride, but not the best due to its waste of water and costly filters.

Distilled Water

The distillation process uses heat to cause the water to become steam. The steam rises and moves to a cooling chamber where it turns back into liquid, leaving behind many contaminants. This type of filtration reduces large particles like minerals and heavy metals but does not remove endocrine disruptors or VOCs since they vaporize at equal or lower temperatures than water and rise with the steam. It does effectively kill bacteria.

Pros: Removes a large amount of contaminants. Does reduce arsenic, asbestos and heavy metals. Does remove fluoride.

Cons: Does not reduce VOCs or endocrine disruptors. Home distillation systems are often large and expensive. Use a large amount of electricity and will not work in power outages. Removes necessary minerals from the water. Long term use can cause mineral deficiencies.

Verdict: Better than bottled water, but definitely not the best option out there, especially for home situations.

Solid Block Carbon Filters

Recognized by the EPA as the best option for removing chemicals like herbicides, pesticides and VOCs. Quality carbon block filters will remove chemicals, pesticides, bacteria, fluoride (with filter attachment), heavy metals, nitrate, nitrites and parasites. Most are gravity based and can safely transform any type of water into safe drinking water including rain water, pond water and even sea water (though these types of water will clog the filters much more quickly and are not ideal!) It will even filter water with food coloring to create clear water (yes, I tested it...)

This is the option that we use now and my only complaint is that it does take up counter space. The advantages are that it is gravity based and will work even without electricity or running water. While these types of units can be more pricey than pitcher filters or other filters up front, they seem to be the least expensive in the long run and require the fewest filter replacements (a big plus for me!). **These types of filters** also don't remove naturally occurring minerals from the water, making it the best tasting filtered water option, in my opinion.

Using the filter calculator from the site we ordered our filter from, I've determined that the specific system we use won't need to have the filter replaced for over 20 years with our current usage (though I'm guessing our usage will increase as the kids get older).

The most common type of this filter is the Berkey and it comes in many sizes for different uses. It can even be used camping to filter river water for drinking! (Tested this too and it saved one of my brother-in-laws from Giardia when other members of his group got it while camping)

Pros: Filters VOCs, heavy metals, chlorine, fluoride, nitrates/ites, bacteria, parasites and other chemicals. Very inexpensive per gallon cost and infrequent filter replacement. Great tasting water. Doesn't require electricity or water pressure to work. Portable options can even be used while traveling.

Cons: Does require counter space and does have to be manually filled (not a big deal for us, we just fill at night and we have plenty of water the next day). More expensive up front.

Verdict: This is what we personally use now and we have several different sizes in home and office and for travel. With our family size, **the biggest unit with the most filters is a great option**, but there are size options for any group size. From my research, this is the best option for removing contaminants without removing necessary minerals.

I've found places locally that carry Berkey Filters (Carbon Block) and they are also available online.

Other Notes:

- Other water treatment and filtering options that I didn't evaluate in-depth are:
- UV Filters which does kill bacteria and parasites but does not reduce other types of contaminants and is not feasible for home use.
- Water softeners which add sodium to the water to reduce calcium and magnesium (thus "softening") but does not filter or remove contaminants.
- Ceramic filters which do remove some contaminants but which are in many cases comparable in price to block carbon filters and which do not remove as many contaminants

Simple Step #3 - Breathe Clean Air



I've heard it said that a person can go three weeks without food, three days without water (roughly) and three minutes without air (roughly). With those numbers, it seems that air quality should be an important consideration for health, as we proportionately consume more air than any other substance and since chemicals can be easily absorbed through the lungs.

Indoor Air Quality

Turns out, outdoor air pollution isn't the biggest offender either. Indoor air has been shown to be 2-5 times as contaminated as outdoor air in some places, and indoor air is often much more stagnant.

Substances like chemical-based cleaners, air fresheners, scents and detergents can further pollute indoor air and contribute to poor indoor air quality. An easy way to reduce this type of indoor air pollution is to switch to non-toxic options for cleaning (I share those later in this guide).

Plants as Air Filters?

I did a lot of research to find the best type of air filters to use in our house. One of our children had allergies, and I wanted to find ways to reduce his allergy reactions in our house. I was ready to spend hundreds of dollars on a top-notch filter and the research I did showed that a much cheaper option might be the best. (We also currently use a basic filter to filter dust and large particles)

According to this article: "In the late '80s, NASA and the Associated Landscape Contractors of America studied houseplants as a way to purify the air in space facilities. They found several plants that filter out common volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Lucky for us the plants can also help clean indoor air on Earth, which is typically far more polluted than outdoor air. Other studies have since been published in the Journal of American Society of Horticultural Science, further proving the science."



Since then, research has narrowed down which plants are the best at filtering indoor air and which plants filter which chemicals the best. Plants naturally absorb carbon dioxide and release

oxygen, but certain plants also eliminate significant amounts of benzene, formaldehyde and/or trichloroethylene.

According to this article: “The recommendation of NASA is to use 15 to 18 good-sized houseplants in six- to eight-inch (203 mm) diameter containers in a 1,800-square-foot (170 m2) house.” This page (PDF) has a good list of which plants are best at filtering each chemical and which plants are toxic to indoor pets.

At our house, we don't have indoor pets, but finding plants that were safe with kids around was a priority. I also needed plants that were relatively easy to take care of and pretty resilient.

The Plants We Use:

I found a short list of plants that were good at filtering indoor air, were resilient and were considered non-toxic for children (and pets), and these are the house plants we currently have:

- **Aloe Vera** (also great for burns)
- **Spider plant** (*Chlorophytum comosum*) – Very resilient and it produces runners (smaller plants) that can be transplanted.
- **Snake plant** (*Sansevieria trifasciata* ‘Laurentii’) Also called “Mother in Law’s Tongue” – “This plant is one of the best for filtering out formaldehyde, which is common in cleaning products, toilet paper, tissues and personal care products. Put one in your bathroom — it’ll thrive with low light and steamy humid conditions while helping filter out air pollutants.” [source]
- **Dracena** (*Dracaena deremensis* ‘Warneckii’) – Also known as Corn Plant, this plant can reach a potential height of 12 feet. “Best for removing xylene, trichloroethylene and formaldehyde, which can be introduced to indoor air through lacquers, varnishes and gasoline.” [source]
- **Christmas Cactus**- Great at cleaning the air, and colorful too.
- **Boston Fern**- Easy to grow, good at filtering the air, and resilient.
- **Bromeliads** – Tropical looking and colorful – great at filtering the air
- **Bamboo palm** (*Chamaedorea sefrizii*) “Also known as the reed palm, this small palm thrives in shady indoor spaces and often produces flowers and small berries. It tops the list of plants best for filtering out both benzene and trichloroethylene. They’re also a good choice for placing around furniture that could be off-gassing formaldehyde.” [source]
- **Yucca**- Good at filtering the air but needs a lot of light.
- **Succulents and Hens & Chickens** – Succulents aren't the best for filtering the air, but they are easy to care for.
- **Herbs** – Also not necessarily known for their air-filtering ability, but I use these and have them in the kitchen anyway. Everything from mattresses to pots/pans to kids PJs can contain harmful chemicals in indoor air.

We have about eight indoor plants and I'm hoping to add more soon. For those who don't want the upkeep of indoor plants or can't have them due to pets/kids/etc, there are some other natural options.

Besides indoor plants, these are my top three natural air cleaners (and I use all three):

Beeswax Candles

Three Natural Ways to Clean Indoor Air



Regular paraffin candles are petroleum derived and can release chemicals like benzene, toluene, soot and other chemicals into the air. These types of candles do more harm than good for indoor air quality and should be avoided.

Pure Beeswax Candles on the other hand burn with almost no smoke or scent and clean the air by releasing negative ions into the air. These negative ions can bind with toxins and help remove them from the air.

Beeswax candles are often especially helpful for those with asthma or allergies and they are effective at removing common allergens like dust and dander from the air. Beeswax candles also burn more slowly than paraffin candles so they last much longer.

I personally only use beeswax candles in our house. We buy them by the case and our favorites are:

Tea-light beeswax candles

Votive size beeswax candles

Salt Lamps

Salt lamps are another natural way to clean indoor air. They are made from himalayan salt crystals and just like the beeswax candles, they release negative ions in to the air to help clean it. They are also a beautiful light source. The only downside.... my kids like to lick them!

“The Himalayan Natural Crystal Salt Lamp also works as an air purifier. When lit, the lamp emits negative ions that fight against positively charged particles that cause you to feel stuffy and sluggish. The lit salt crystal clears the air naturally of allergens like smoke, pet dander, pollens, and other air pollutants. It dilutes odors so that you can breathe easier. People with asthma often find it helpful in reducing their symptoms. You can keep the lamp lit for as long as you like to maintain this purifying effect.” (from this description)

We don't do night lights in our kids rooms, but if we did or if we need a light source at night for reading, we use salt lamps. The natural orange glow doesn't disrupt sleep hormones like fluorescent or blue lights do and I find it very relaxing.

We have an 8-inch salt lamp that we use regularly (it is also the most cost effective for its size, as the bigger lamps can get very pricey).

Bamboo Charcoal

Another natural air cleaning option I recently discovered is bamboo charcoal. I've talked about one of my unusual uses for charcoal before and we use a charcoal block water filter to remove toxins from our water.

Charcoal can have the same toxin-removing effect on the air. We use bamboo charcoal in burlap bags in our house. They work wonders for odor removal and removing toxins from the air:

"Moso air purifying bags, made of linen and filled with bamboo charcoal, absorb unpleasant odors and dehumidify the air. The porous structure of the high density bamboo charcoal helps remove bacteria, harmful pollutants and allergens from the air and absorbs moisture, preventing mold and mildew by trapping the impurities inside each pore. The Moso air purifying bag has been scientifically proven to reduce the amount of formaldehyde, ammonia, benzene, and chloroform gases emitted from everyday items such as paint, carpeting, furniture, air fresheners, chemical cleaners, rubber, and plastics. Toxin free, the bags are safe to use around pets and children. The bamboo charcoal rejuvenates when the bags are placed in sunlight once a month. You can reuse the bags for two years, after which the charcoal can be poured into the soil around plants to fertilize and help retain moisture. (source)

I've found that these are also great for removing odors from cars or from the bathroom (especially if you have recently potty-trained boys who don't always have perfect aim!).

No room in the budget for plants or air filters? Just make a point to open your windows whenever possible to get fresh air inside!

Simple Step #4 - Family Exercise

We've all heard that exercise is important for health. We've also heard that spending time with loved ones and spending time playing/relaxing are good for health.

Why not combine all of these beneficial activities and have some family play time that doubles as exercise.

Depending on the activity, this can be completely free and a fun family bonding experience.

The main idea is to get 30 minutes to an hour of good physical activity as a family each day if possible. Some of our favorite ways to do this are:

- **Family walks** - especially after dinner are great to help the kinds wind down and a great time to talk about the day.
- **Hiking** - not convenient for every day, but a great weekend activity that combines spending time outdoors with family time and exercise.
- **Picking up a lightly competitive sport** - Unless you happen to have a bunch of teenage sons who are all the same age, tackle football probably won't be the best family bonding activity. Other sports can be a lot of fun though! Try playing catch or going to the batting cages, throwing around a basketball, learning badminton or tennis, picking up a volleyball or kicking around a soccer ball at a local park.
- **Dance party**- This won't be a favorite for everyone, but a friend of mine is a zumba instructor and has daily 15-minute dance parties with her kids in the living room. They all get their heart rates up and her kids are already great dancers at really young ages.
- **Yard work**- this is usually a dad-favorite and not so much a kid-favorite but yard work can be great for getting exercise (movement, heavy lifting, etc) and it also accomplishes something that needs to be done.
- **Go to the playground** - If you have young children, find a local park with a good playground that has ladders, monkey bars, and other opportunities to climb. Feeling brave? See if you can still manage the monkey bars yourself.
- **Get a trampoline** - Our trampoline has been the biggest source of entertainment for our children (besides our pets). They can jump for hours and not only are they getting exercise, the jumping is good for their lymph systems!



Simple Step #5 - Stress Relief

While stress is often thought of as a strictly emotional and mental problem, there is a growing amount of evidence that it has a host of physiological effects as well. One study found that a chemical released when the body is in a stressed state, Neuropeptide Y, causes fat cells to open and store fat rather than burn it. Another study found that, especially in women, higher cortisol (stress hormone) leads to weight gain around the waist, even in otherwise slender women.

Another study found that stress shortens telomeres in cells at a faster rate, leading to premature aging and the increased risk of diseases that accompanies it.

Stress can impact hormones and fertility as well. When cortisol is high in the body, progesterone is often low because the body uses progesterone to manufacture cortisol. This is often why stress and elevated cortisol levels correlate with trouble conceiving or maintaining a pregnancy. While natural progesterone cream can be helpful, it is important to address the causes as well.

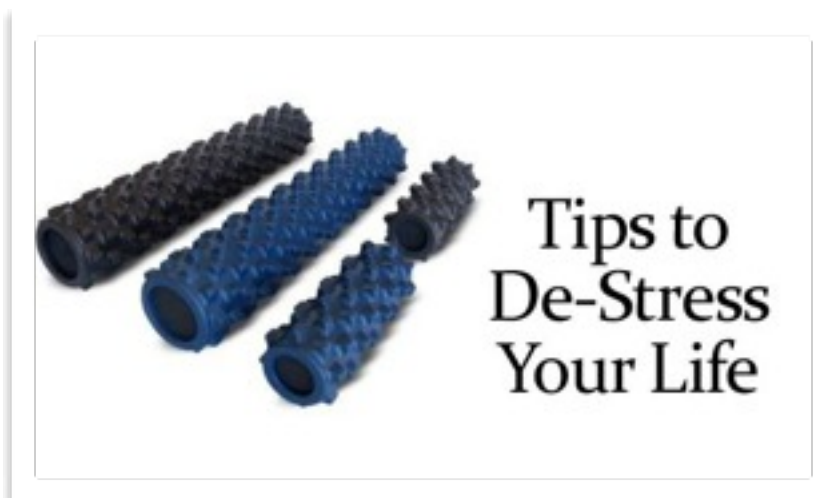
Other physical reactions associated with high stress levels are:

- Hair loss (from prolonged stress)
- Headaches
- Insomnia
- Dry mouth
- Increased incidence of heart disease and stroke
- Higher incidence of allergy
- Muscle pain or twitching
- Hormonal and menstrual troubles
- Increased incidence of eczema and psoriasis
- Slower healing from all illness

Types of Stress

Mental and emotional stress are often considered the culprits in stress related problems, but there are also physical stressors that can cause the same problems. Before stress can be reduced, one must figure out what is causing it in the first place.

Certainly, lifestyle factors, hectic schedules or a busy job (like motherhood), can cause stress, but so can other factors like:



- Eating foods that the body is allergic or intolerant to (even if you don't know you have the allergy)
- Not getting enough sleep
- Toxins in your home or environment
- An underlying hormone imbalance
- Leptin or insulin resistance

What To Do About It:

Effectively dealing with stress requires an integrative approach that not only addresses the causes of stress (mental, emotional, physical) but also works to actively reverse the damage that has already been done. For me personally, this is one of my toughest health challenges to address, since even though I know what I should be doing, I don't always have time to fit it all in.

To start, we definitely must address the basics:

- **Physical Stress:** While some physical stress is good (sprinting, lifting weights, etc.) other types can be harmful (chronic cardio, lack of sleep, etc.) and diet choices also create a physical stress. A poor diet, especially one that includes any foods to which you are intolerant or allergic to can create a stress reaction in your body, even if you minimize other types of stresses. To help reduce physical stress, eat a solid real-food diet, get enough sleep and avoid toxins when you can. See the supplement and sleep info below for some practical tips.
- **Emotional Stress:** This one can obviously have many causes, but can often be addressed by working through tough relationships, making time for prayer and meditation, keeping a gratitude journal to focus on the positive, and making time to unwind.
- **Mental Stress:** Similar to emotional stress, this type of stress is often helped by meditation, time management, and organization.

Since this is one of my biggest struggles personally, I've been experimenting lately with ways to reduce stress and wanted to share some of the ones that seem to be working for me:

Supplements:

If some of your stress is physical, or if you have any type of inflammation in your body, there are some supplements that can really help reduce the effects on your body. Especially if you struggled with food allergies for a while before being diagnosed and removing foods from your diet (or if you have celiac disease or autoimmune disorders) removing the offending foods is only half of the solution.

It is also important to address the inflammation in the body and help the body heal. Even with an optimal diet, there are some supplements that can help reduce inflammation and decrease physical stress in the body:

- Fermented Cod Liver Oil/High Vitamin Butter Oil Blend (also great for remineralizing teeth)- This combination, or even just regular Fermented Cod Liver Oil contains high levels of antioxidants and is great for reducing oxidative stress in the body. It contains high levels of Omega-3s and Vitamins A, D and K, which help to reduce inflammation (including arterial inflammation). In some studies, it was shown to improve glucose response in patients with

both type 1 and type 2 diabetes. It has also been shown to be helpful in patients with Colitis, IBS, Crohn's and other digestive issues, which is important since these conditions create tremendous physical stress in the body. I personally take Fermented Cod Liver Oil daily, as do my husband and kids.

- Probiotics: If there is any kind of intestinal damage from food allergies or leaky gut, or if a person has yeast overgrowth or intestinal disturbances, probiotics can be a tremendous help in normalizing gut bacteria. These can also be especially beneficial for children, whose gut bacteria is still forming. Stress hormones also deplete the natural gut bacteria and can lead to further problems.
- Gelatin- I've written about it in depth before, but Gelatin helps sooth the digestive system and reduce inflammation. Its anti-inflammatory properties also make it great for joints and joint pain. Personally, I take it for the skin and hair benefits and many people take it to help reduce inflammation. There is some evidence that it can help reduce stress hormones since stress hormones tend to be stored in the muscle tissue of animals. Most people don't get enough gelatinous and bone tissue from animals and eat a disproportionate amount of muscle meat, so regularly taking Gelatin can help balance this out.
- Magnesium- Another one that I've written about in depth before, but Magnesium has excellent anti-inflammatory properties. Practically everyone is deficient in it, due to declining soil magnesium levels, and it is an easy thing to supplement. Kevin Cottrell, who is well known in the Paleosphere was able to reduce his C-Reactive Protein from 5.4 (semi-dangerous level) to 0.44 (excellent level) in a month using Magnesium and Cold Thermogenesis. Some people have trouble digesting Magnesium effectively, especially if they are highly deficient, so Topical Magnesium Oil is helpful for those people. It is also available in capsule or drink mix (fizzy like soda) form.
- **Let Food Be Your Medicine**: Consuming lots of healthy fats, antioxidant rich foods and healthy protein sources will also help your body counteract the negative effects of stress.

Simple Step #6 - Good Sleep

The importance of sleep is well known in today's world. Yet, statistically, most of us (me included) don't always get enough quality sleep. Some of us struggle to fall asleep, others to stay asleep, and others to make time to actually get enough sleep.



Not surprisingly, sleep is a hormone dependent process, and with all the variables in our lives that can affect proper hormone balance (foods, toxins, artificial light, etc) it makes sense that many people struggle with sleep. This is also why times when hormones change often have a negative effect on sleep (menopause, puberty, pregnancy, etc)

While mainstream thinking might recommend a pharmaceutical option to help deal with sleep issues, artificially augmenting the hormone system to induce sleep isn't without its problems (just

check out the side-effects and warnings list!) and can have an impact on other hormone functions as well.

Often, lack of quality sleep stems from one or more lifestyle causes, and it is important to address these underlying issues as they can impact more than just sleep.

The Problem

Lack of sleep = Stress on the body = weight gain, premature aging, hair loss, hormone imbalances, infertility, and lowered immune function.

Hormone problems that cause sleep disturbances don't just begin at bedtime, and they can't be fixed by just addressing them at this time. Ever noticed that outdoor animals don't have trouble sleeping and waking when they are supposed to? They don't toss and turn to fall asleep and they don't need pills to help them do so (speaking of animals... I don't have any, but indoor animals could potentially have some of the same struggles that humans do).

Proper sleep hormone production (melatonin) depends on proper hormone function during waking hours (serotonin and others). As the endocrine system is a complete system, hormone imbalances (PCOS, Endometriosis, etc) can often lead to poor sleep and vice versa.

Stress hormones can have a tremendous impact on the sleep cycle as well, and it is a two-way street. Lack of sleep elevates stress hormones, and stress hormones can cause sleep problems.

Optimize Sleep While You Are Awake

To optimize sleep during the night, one must also optimize factors during waking hours including food, supplements and exposure to light/outdoors.

Getting a quality night of sleep actually begins when you wake at the beginning of the day and there are many factors that can have a dramatic impact on sleep length and quality.

Foods for Sleep

Just as foods can impact health in other areas, foods can contribute to good or bad sleep. To help improve your chances of quality sleep, these are the best foods to consume:

- **Healthy Fats**- such as coconut oil, organic and pasture raised meats, eggs, avocado and butter all help provide your body with the necessary building blocks to manufacture sleep hormones.
- **High Antioxidant Foods**- Also important for hormone production and removal of toxins that can impede sleep. Focus on vegetables, high nutrient fruits, and herbal or green teas (green tea early in the day only).
- **Quality Proteins, especially at dinner**: For best sleep, it is better to stop eating at least 4 hours before bedtime, and preferably by 6pm every night. Your evening meal should include proteins, vegetables and healthy fats. Eating enough protein at this meal will help prepare the body to enter the sleep cycle.



Avoid:

- **Sugars**: Sugars and carbohydrates, especially at night, can cause a blood sugar spike and crash that will lead to difficulty falling or staying asleep. Many people crave carbohydrates (chocolate, anyone?) in the evening, which is a sign of an underlying hormone problem to begin with but eating carbohydrates late at night can cause problems falling asleep or lead to waking in the middle of the night when blood sugar levels drop.
- **Grains**- I've written before about the negative effect grains can have on health, and if you have an intolerance to grains, this can cause physical stress in your body, which alters the hormone cycle and can impede sleep.
- **Vegetable Oils**- No one should ever eat them anyway, but I have a theory that just as these artificial fats can cause problems in new skin formation (skin cancer) they can cause problems in the hormone cycle, as hormones need (saturated) fats for production and giving the body the wrong building blocks for hormones can wreak havoc with hormone production.

Supplements for Sleep

Sadly, it is often difficult to get enough nutrients from foods as our soil is depleted and foods are picked before ripe so they can be shipped around the world. Especially if you struggle from a health challenge or sleep problem, it is often helpful to supplement some key nutrients, at least in the short term, as you build your body back up.

- Fermented Cod Liver Oil -I have personally noticed a difference in my sleep quality since adding this to my regimen. I take it in the morning f.lux(about 1/2 tsp) and don't sleep as well when I don't. The presence of fat soluble vitamins A, D and K plus Omega-3s can explain why this particular supplement is great for promoting hormone production and improving sleep. For this reason, it also helps balance other hormones (in cases of infertility, etc) and is great for growing children.
- **A couple tablespoons of coconut oil** melted in a cup of herbal tea per day can help give the body the building blocks to make sleep hormones. This is also a great way to boost energy in the morning.
- Magnesium- Many people are deficient in Magnesium and this particular deficiency can have a big impact on sleep quality. Some people find that just adding a product like Natural Calm about 30 minutes before bedtime can really improve sleep.
- Gelatin- Many of us eat a disproportionate amount of animal muscle meat compared to bone broths, organ meats and marrow. If you aren't a fan of consuming liver daily, drinking natural gelatin (from grass fed sources) can help balance your intake. Consumption of only muscle meats, which are higher in stress hormones, can cause problems in the sleep cycle. Personally, I often drink a cup of chamomile or herbal tea with a tablespoon of gelatin dissolved in it each night a couple hours before bed.

If you have a solid diet and are already taking the things above, specific sleep related herbs might help your fall asleep. Try my sleep tincture, or some chamomile or catnip to help you relax.

A Healthy Daily Routine

A daily (and nightly) routine can make a big difference in how easily you fall and stay asleep. You'll have to experiment to find out what works best for you but here are some helpful suggestions:

- Wake up and go to bed at the same time, even on weekends to keep your hormone cycle regular.
- Eat a high protein/high fat snack a few hours before bed (7pm or earlier) or consume a lot at dinner.
- Avoid caffeine after 1 pm.
- Install F.lux (it is free) on all computers and devices to reduce blue light and help you sleep better (it is also easier on the eyes!)
- Drink enough water during the day and stop drinking about 2 hours before bed so you don't have to wake up to use the bathroom.
- Take a soothing salt bath about an hour before bed with some relaxing music or a great book.

- Get at least 30 minutes of sunlight each day (even if you aren't trying to get your vitamin D). The exposure to the wide-spectrum light during the day boosts serotonin levels, which will help improve melatonin levels at night
- Avoid artificial light as much as possible after the sun goes down.
- Pray, meditate or find a way to reduce stress.
- Give yourself a massage before bed to release stress and help relax (Personally, I love this for home-massage)
- Stretch before bed to relax muscles.

The Sleep Environment

Your sleep environment is also extremely important for sleep quality. Artificial light, warm temperatures, sudden noises, and EMFs can all effect sleep quality, but these things are almost always fixable. Again, you'll have to experiment to figure out what works best for you, but in general, here are some tips:

- **Remove ALL artificial light**, including the light on your alarm clock, TV light, phone, etc. I use blackout curtains because we have artificial light outside, and cover my clock light with a towel. Our kids don't have night lights, and they typically sleep very well.
- **Keep the temperature around 65-68 degrees** and always below 70 degrees.
- **Try some white noise** like sounds of rain, ocean or our kids' favorite, Gregorian Chant (though if any of them ever decide to become a cloistered religious, they will have trouble... chant always puts them to sleep!)
- **Trade out your jolting buzzing alarm clock** for a gentle sunlight alarm clock that will wake you up much more gently. I don't know about you, but my dread of the sound of the alarm clock sound always caused me to wake up a few times in the early morning in anticipation of it
- **Try an earthing mat.** I am still experimenting with this one, but there is some evidence that sleeping on a grounding mat reduces your exposure EMFs and improves sleep quality. While I have noticed a big difference on myself, I don't know how much is mental, so I'm experimenting with having the kids sleep on it without them knowing what it does. The book Earthing explains more of the theory behind this method and I'm working on finding a good source of the mats. According to the book, you can also create the same effect by spending time barefoot outside on dirt, grass or rocks daily for at least 30 minutes (If you garden barefoot in the middle of the day, you'll get three benefits in one! Exercise, Vitamin D and the negative electrons from the earth)
- **Going to bed before 10pm** (or transitioning to this schedule) will also greatly impact your body's healing ability, as there are supposed to be additional benefits to sleep before midnight.

Simple Step #7 - Reducing Toxins

As mentioned above, toxins are a part of daily life these days. Thankfully, while we can't avoid them altogether, we can reduce them in many cases.

Often, some of the worst toxins can be found within the home. Harsh cleaning products, pesticides, chemicals and even beauty products can be sources of high levels of harmful chemicals.

In order to save money and avoid chemicals, I now make many of these products myself.

You can find all of my favorite natural cleaning recipes by clicking [here](#).
All of my favorite natural beauty recipes are available [here](#).

Since toxin exposure is not completely avoidable, it is also a good idea to try to remove any toxins that have accumulated in the body. I'm not personally a big fan of harsh internal detox programs but I think that there are some gentle ways to help the body remove toxins. One of my favorites is a detox bath (also great for stress relief!):



Here are a few of my favorites:

Salt Detox Bath Recipe

1/4 cup Sea Salt or Himalayan Salt
1/4 cup Epsom Salt
1/4 cup Baking Soda
1/3 cup Apple Cider Vinegar
Favorite essential oil if desired (I use 10 drops of peppermint or lavender)

What to do: Dissolve Salt, epsom salt, and baking soda in boiling water in a quart size jar and set aside. Fill tub with warm/hot water and add apple cider vinegar. Pour salt mixture in and add essential oils if using.

Soak in bath for 30 minutes or as long as desired. Note that with any detox bath, you may feel tired or lightheaded when you get out. I don't recommend doing this while home alone or before going somewhere in case you are tired or need help.

This bath is great for soothing skin irritation, boosting magnesium levels and overall detoxing.

Clay Detox Bath Recipe

1/2 cup bentonite clay
1/2 cup epsom salts
essential oils if desired

What to do: Dissolve the epsom salts in a warm/hot bath and add essential oils if desired. For the clay there are two options:

Vigorously mix the clay into a small amount of water until the clumps are mostly dissolved. Do not use metal for this! I mix with a plastic spoon in a glass jar. Add the clay mix to the bath and soak for at least 20 minutes.

Mix that clay with a small amount of water to make a paste. Stand in the tub full of water and rub the clay mix all over your body to create a skin mask and let dry for 5 minutes before sitting down. This provides direct contact with the skin and effectively pulls toxins from the skin. Soak in bath at least 20 minutes or as long as desired. While soaking, use a wash cloth to scrub any remaining clay off the skin.

This bath is great for removing a lot of toxins as the clay binds to heavy metals and the epsom salts help pull a variety of toxins from the body while replenishing magnesium levels.

Oxygen Detox Bath Recipe

2 cups (or more) of Hydrogen Peroxide
1 Tablespoon dried Ginger Powder

What to Do: Fill the tub with warm/hot water and add the hydrogen peroxide and dried Ginger. Soak in tub for 30 minutes or as long as desired. This bath is especially helpful during illness as the ginger helps clear congestion or alleviate body aches. It can also be helpful for allergies or skin irritation.

Notes:

- The warmer the water, the more powerful the detox effect will be.
- If you have chlorine and fluoride in your water, I recommend adding a few tablespoons of bentonite clay to any of these baths to help absorb the chemicals so they aren't absorbed into the skin.
- Any of these natural ingredients can be used alone or in combination for a cleansing effect.
- All recipes can be doubled or tripled but this will increase the detox effect.
- I recommend starting slowly with this or any health change.

Important: I am not a doctor or medical professional and the advice in this post is for informational purposes only. If you are pregnant or have a health condition, consult a doctor before adding anything to your health routine.

One Week Meal Plan + Shopping List

(Note: “FN” = Family Number, or the number of adult servings you are preparing a meal for. For our family of 2 adults and 5 kids, I cook for a “FN” of 5 since not all of the kids eat an adult serving.)

Day 1: Easy Chicken Marsala with Broccoli[Easy, Fast]

You Need per serving:

- 1 chicken breast or 2 thighs (bones removed) (xFN)
- 1/4 to 1/2 tsp each of salt, garlic powder, oregano, thyme and black pepper (to taste)
- 1 tablespoon fat/oil of choice (tallow, lard, butter, coconut oil) (xFN- 1/4 cup/family of 4)
- 1/2 cup sliced mushrooms (xFN- approx. 1 package/family of 4)
- 1 Tablespoon Marsala wine (optional, can sub chicken broth but wine is better)(xFN- 1/4 cup/family of 4)
- 1/4 of a large head or 1/2 of a bag (frozen) broccoli (xFN)

Instructions:

1. Melt oil/fat in a large skillet that has a lid.
2. Cut chicken in half lengthwise to make it thinner and season with spices.
3. Fry the chicken in the skillet for 2-3 minutes per side until starting to brown (may have to do a few at a time depending on the size of your skillet).
4. Remove chicken and add sliced mushrooms.
5. Pour wine into skillet to de-glaze pan and stir with mushrooms for 1 minute to let alcohol cook off.
6. Return chicken to pan, cover with lid and reduce heat to a simmer.
7. Continue cooking, covered, on low heat for 10-15 minutes until chicken is cooked.
8. While chicken is finishing cooking, boil 2 quarts of water in a large pot. Add Broccoli and cook until soft.
9. Strain broccoli and serve with chicken and salad if desired.

Day 2: Slow-cooker Roast with Root Vegetables and Mashed Cauliflower (Leftovers will make Day 4 meal) [Slow-cooker, easy]

You Need per person/serving:

- 1 to 1.5 lbs chuck roast or oven type roast (xFN- will need for another meal)
- 2 cloves garlic (xFN)
- 1/2 of an onion (xFN)
- 1 cup of carrots, roughly chopped (xFN)
- 1 stalk of celery, roughly chopped (xFN)
- 1/4 cup red wine
- 1/2 of a 15-ounce can of diced tomatoes (xFN- 2 cans/family of 4)
- 1 cup beef stock (xFN)
- Spices to taste: rosemary, thyme, pepper, turmeric (sparingly)
- 1/4 large head or 1/2 bag cauliflower (xFN)
- 1 Tablespoon butter (xFN- 1/4 cup/family of 4)
- sprinkle of salt (to taste)

Instructions:

1. Put meat in slow cooker (or can use dutch oven in the regular oven at 300 degrees)
2. Rough chop all vegetables and place on top of meat.
3. Pour wine, diced tomatoes, and beef stock over the vegetables.
4. Sprinkle spices to taste and cover.
5. Turn crock pot on and cook on low (6-8 hours) or high (3-4 hours)
6. About 20 minutes before meat is done, boil 2 quarts of water and cook cauliflower until soft.
7. Strain cauliflower and use a food processor or immersion blender to mix with butter and salt until smooth.
8. Save leftover meat for dinner on day 4!

Day 3: Zucchini Lasagna with Salad

You Need per person/serving (makes leftovers!):

- 1/4 lb of ground beef (xFN- 1 lb or more/family of 4)
- 1/4 of an onion (xFN)
- 8-10 ounces of pasta sauce (xFN)
- 1 cup ricotta cheese (xFN)
- 1/4 lb Mozzarella Cheese (xFN)
- 2 tablespoons Parmesan (1/2 cup/family of 4)
- 2 eggs (xFN)
- 1 medium zucchini (xFN)
- Spices: 1/4 tsp each of basil, oregano, marjoram, garlic powder, salt, pepper, etc(xFN)

note: If your family doesn't eat dairy or if you don't want to put all the effort in to Lasagna, just cook the zucchini into noodles as in the directions below and make a simple meat sauce by browning meat, then adding sauce and spices and serving over the zucchini like spaghetti.

What to do:

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees.
2. Thinly slice zucchini into thin slices (1/4 inch or smaller) lengthwise and lay on large (well-oiled!!!) baking sheet until starting to brown and most liquid has cooked out. (If you are making spaghetti instead, cut into thin strips lengthwise and then lengthwise the other way to make long straws and just spread on baking sheet.)
3. While that is cooking, brown meat in a large skillet with diced onion until cooked.
4. Add pasta sauce to the skillet and stir until heated.
5. Mix Ricotta cheese with eggs, Parmesan and half of the Mozzarella (grated). (If making spaghetti, skip this step).
6. When Zucchini is done, remove from oven and start layers in a large 9x13 baking dish in this order: Meat sauce on bottom, then zucchini slices, then ricotta mixture until all ingredients are used up but make sure there is a little bit of meat sauce on the top.
7. When all ingredients are added, place back into a 350 degree oven for 45 minutes or until egg mixture is set and it is heated through. (If making spaghetti, just serve the meat sauce over the cooked zucchini noodles)
8. Add remaining Mozzarella 10 minutes before it is done cooking.
9. Serve immediately with salad and Italian Music :-)

Day 4: Build Your Own Fajita Beef Lettuce Tacos with Guacamole [Fast, Easy]

You need per person/serving:

- leftover pot roast from Day 2 dinner
- 1 bell pepper (xFN)
- 1/4 of an onion (xFN)
- 1 tablespoon fat of choice: butter, coconut oil, tallow, lard
- 1/2 tsp cumin (xFN- to taste)
- 1/4 tsp chili powder (xFN- to taste)
- 1/2 of a large head of romaine lettuce (xFN)- for “tacos”
- Toppings of choice: Diced onion, tomato, cilantro, avocado, sour cream, cheese, salsa, etc

What to do:

1. Heat oil/fat in a large skillet.
2. Thinly slice peppers and onion and cook in oil until soft.
3. Chop beef and add to pan to heat.
4. Sprinkle with cumin and chili powder to taste.
5. Make avocados into guacamole if using and assemble all other topping ingredients.
6. Serve the fajita beef and toppings rolled into romaine lettuce leaves like a taco.

Day 5: Baked Lemon/Dill Salmon and Brussels Sprouts [Fast and Easy]

You Need per person/serving:

- 1 piece of salmon (wild caught if possible) (xFN)
- 1 tablespoon of butter (xFN)(1/4 cup/family of 4)
- salt, pepper, and dill, to taste
- 1/4 of a lemon (xFN)
- 1/2 pound of Brussels Sprouts (xFN- 1-2 lbs/family of 4)
- 2 pieces of bacon (xFN)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil, ghee or melted tallow (xFN- 1/4 cup family of 4)
- salt, pepper, garlic and other spices to taste

What to do:

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees.
2. While heating, cut Brussels Sprouts in half and toss with oil.
3. Sprinkle with spices and spread on a baking sheet.
4. Chop uncooked bacon and mix in with Brussels Sprouts on the baking sheet.
5. Put into preheated oven and bake for 30 minutes.
6. Make sure fish is defrosted, place in baking dish and top with butter, spices (salt, pepper, dill, etc) and lay a slice of lemon on top. .
7. Add to oven once Brussels Sprouts have cooked 30 minutes.
8. Cook an additional 15-20 minutes or until fish is cooked and starting to flake.
9. Serve both immediately with salad (optional)

Day 6: Chicken Stir Fry [Fast, Easy]

You need per serving:

- 1 chicken breast or 2 thighs (xFN)
- 1 tablespoon of butter (xFN)
- 1/2 of an onion (xFN)
- 1 small/medium yellow squash (xFN)
- 1/4 of a bag of frozen green beans or 1/4 pound fresh (xFN)
- About 1/4 tsp each of garlic powder, salt, pepper, and basil

What to do:

1. Chop vegetables and set aside.
2. Chop chicken.
3. Heat butter in large skillet or wok.
4. Add chicken and stir until cooked adding seasonings as it cooks.
5. Add vegetables (onions first, then squash, then broccoli) and cook until starting to soften.
6. Season more if desired
7. Serve when vegetables are cooked.
8. Enjoy!

Day 7: Leftovers or Chef Salad

(Note: This day is for leftovers, chef salad since there are often parties or gatherings this week, and I didn't want to have you buy extra food and it go to waste. If you will be cooking every meal at home, either cook extra of one meal for leftovers or just prepare large salads or soup this night)

Wellness Mama Meals Shopping List February Week One

Meat:

- _____ chicken breasts (2xFN) or thighs (4xFN) (1,6)(or whole chicken, pulled off bone)
- _____ pounds ground beef (1/4 x FN + Leftovers)(3)
- _____ pound oven/pot/chuck roast (1-1.5 lbsxFN)(will be for 2 meals!) (2,4)
- _____ pieces of wild-caught salmon (xFN plus extra if you want)(5)
- _____ Enough extra meats for breakfasts and lunches throughout the week

Produce:

- _____ medium to large onions (2xFN) (2,4)
- _____ heads Broccoli (1 large head per every 3-4 people or 2-3 bags frozen per 4 people)(1)
- _____ heads Cauliflower (1 large head per every 3-4 people or 2-3 bags frozen per 4 people)(2)
- _____ 1 sweet pepper (xFN)(2,4)
- _____ heads or Romaine Lettuce (1/2 xFN)(4)
- _____ pounds of fresh Brussels Sprouts (or bags frozen) (1/2 xFN)(5)
- _____ pounds of fresh Green beans (or bags frozen) (1/4 xFN)(6)
- _____ medium zucchini (xFN) (3)
- _____ small/medium yellow squash (xFN)(6)
- _____ carrots (about 1/4 lb per person)
- _____ avocados (1/2 xFN)(4)
- 1 head of celery
- 1 bulb of garlic
- 1 large package of mushrooms (1)
- diced tomato (optional for taco toppings)(4)
- Bunch of cilantro for taco night-optional(4)
- 1 lemon (5)
- Enough salad for lunches and dinners
- other veggies like cucumber, peppers, celery, etc for snacks
- apples, oranges or other desired fruits

Other:

- 2eggs (xFN)(1,5) plus breakfasts all week(3)
- _____ pounds of butter (1/2xFN + for cooking eggs for breakfasts and dinners)
- chicken or beef broth/stock (1 cup per person/serving)(1)
- 1/4 pound Mozzarella cheese (xFN)(optional)(3)
- 2 tablespoons Parmesan Cheese (xFN optional)(3)
- Ricotta Cheese (1 cupxFN-1 large container/family of 4)(3)
- sour cream (xFN optional)(4)
- Cheddar or other cheese for tacos (4)
- 1 (15 ounce) cans of regular diced tomatoes (per 2 people)(2)
- 1 -24 ounce jar of pasta/pizza sauce (check ingredients) (per 2-3 people)(3)
- 2 tablespoons Marsala wine (xFN)(optional, but recommended- can sub broth instead)(1)
- 1/4 cups red wine (xFN)(Optional)(2)

Snack options: nuts of choice, more eggs for deviled eggs, avocado or guacamole (highly recommend), tuna, canned wild caught salmon, almond butter, celery, apples, cream cheese, cucumbers, etc.

Other: _____

Make sure you have: salt, pepper, garlic, oregano, basil, tallow, lard or ghee to cook in, coconut oil, rosemary, thyme, turmeric, cumin, chili powder, dill

Wow... You read the whole thing!

I hope that these tips were as helpful for your family as they were for my family!

As I mentioned at the beginning of this guide, my mission is to help other families improve health without the stress and the learning curve that I had. If you found this guide helpful, please keep in touch and stop by WellnessMama.com for new posts and information.

I'd also be really grateful if you would share any posts that you find helpful with your family and friends so that together, we can change the future of health for our children.

Thanks again for reading and for being part of #TeamWellnessMama. This mission and these changes won't be accomplished because of me, but because all of us have the power together to make these changes.

Let's stay in touch! Come say hi on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or [Google+](#) or around the blog!