he trend toward one-child families continues to grow. Over the past 25 years, the number of families with “onlies” has more than doubled, the United States Census Bureau reports.

This is a worldwide phenomenon. Nearly half of households in England have one child, and families are smaller in most industrialized countries including Italy, Portugal, Spain, South Korea and Japan. They’re shrinking in India as well and, of course, China had a one-child policy for many years.

Census analysis from the Pew Research Center shows that an estimated 20 percent of American women at the end of their childbearing years have an only child, more than double the rate since the 1980s. In large cities, that number goes up to 30 percent and higher.

why is this happening?

Several factors affect family size. They include the increase of women in the workplace and the high cost of raising and educating a child. Social changes such as the pattern of marrying later has an impact, too—many older women have difficulty conceiving a second child. Uncertainty about economic issues also deters people. Many parents say they want to provide the best for their kids in terms of time, attention and educational opportunities, and they feel they can manage this with one child, but not more.

Some families want to have more kids but cannot or are discouraged by forces over which they have little or no control such as divorce, adoption regulations or problems with fertility. Others are constrained financially to support children from a previous marriage or even by unforeseen complications with an aging parent.

Pressure to have more children

Parents who choose to have one child and are happy with that decision may still be subject to pressure from family, friends or even their own child to have a larger family. This pressure, along with negative myths and stereotypes about only children, can create doubt and render the decision more difficult.

Myths about only children—or “singletons,” as they are called—have been passed down through generations. Beginning around 1896, they received “scientific” backing when a few psychologists conducted studies and reported that only children had a host of “peculiarities” such as being lonely, bossy, selfish and spoiled.

Continued on page 2...
The only-child family...
Continued from page 1...

Fact vs. fiction

Most concerns about raising just one child are without merit today. Here are some of the myths debunked by recent research.

On social skills. There are great benefits to having siblings, but being accepted and well-liked are not among them. A study conducted at Ohio State University of 13,500 kids in grades 7–12 reported that only children were just as popular with their peers as kids who had siblings.

Onesies were also found to be as capable as other children of settling disputes, compromising and understanding that they are not the center of the universe.

On imaginary friends. People sometimes worry that onlyies have more “pretend friends” than kids with siblings have. Marjory Taylor, a psychology professor at the University of Oregon, has found that it’s not solely firstborns or those with no siblings who create imaginary companions—65 percent of all children have pretend pals. The appearance of these companions is not necessarily a sign of loneliness or psychological distress.

On independence. The myth that only children are shy, introverted and more dependent than kids with siblings is just plain wrong, according to Jerome Kagan, the prominent Harvard psychologist.

His studies showed that shyness has a biological basis and is often outgrown or overcome. He found that only children are the same as their peers who had siblings in this respect.

On self-reliance. Most singletons become increasingly self-reliant as they get older. They want friends, they want to be involved and they do whatever it takes to achieve that goal.

Independence is fostered more by parents who do not “hover” than by the presence of siblings in the house. “Helicopter parents” exist in homes with both only children and siblings alike.

On being spoiled. There’s a perception that the parents of onlies indulge their children more than parents with more than one child do. Large studies have evaluated only children in China and many other countries and have found that singletons are no more spoiled than the population overall.

Parents who consistently support commercialism and submit to a child’s demands create spoiled kids, with or without siblings. “Spoiling” is a parenting problem that is not cured by having two or more children.

Mapping the future

In the not-so-distant past, when only-child families were an extreme minority, many parents of one felt odd or ostracized. That’s changing quickly with the times, the economics and the social atmosphere. As the number of onlies grows, any lingering stigma will continue to fall away.

Even so, getting people with dated outlooks to think differently is still a hurdle parents with one child may confront. But before you can influence how skeptics think about only children, you may have to change how you yourself think and respond.

Abandon any guilt or shame for deciding not to give birth to or adopt a second child. Stop the “blame game” if that’s what you are playing. And if your only child exhibits poor behavior, for example, don’t assume it’s because of an absent sibling.

Real differences between onlies and children with siblings, wherever they grow up, have more to do with how parents parent than the fact that they have one child.

What parents can do

Just as larger families cope with sibling rivalry, favoritism and fighting, parents with one child face their own set of challenges. For one, they need to be mindful of the intensity of a close-knit family twosome or threesome that can be difficult for a child to handle.

Here are some other suggestions for the parents of onlies:

- Socialize your child early on.

Singletons need to spend time with kids their own age to help sharpen their sense of cooperation, sharing and empathy for others beyond what you encourage at home. In peer settings, kids also learn to stand up for themselves.

- Avoid being a “fish bowl” parent.

Without siblings to divert their attention, parents tend to notice every misstep an only child makes. Allow your child the freedom to “get away with” minor transgressions that you would probably miss if your attention were on more than one child.

- Think big.

Before you put away toys, pick up dirty laundry or clear dishes from the table, ask yourself: “Would I be doing this if I had several children?” Probably not, assuming kids are old enough to help. Give your child age-appropriate responsibilities, just as you would in a larger family.

- Set sensible limits.

Don’t let an only child rule the roost and dictate what the family will do. While you want your child to be part of some family decision-making, be clear that you are in charge—and that you have the last word about bedtime, TV watching, the use of digital devices and other important matters.

- Encourage kids to solve their own problems.

It’s normal to be protective, and it’s easy for parents with one child to fall into the trap of shielding him or her too much. Step back so your child can gain experience in making independent decisions and settling disputes that may arise. Just step in when necessary, as any parent would.

- Don’t focus on oneness.

If you are disappointed or feel guilty about not providing a sibling, keep it to yourself. Otherwise, your child may begin to believe that he or she is not “enough” for you.

- Modify your expectations.

Only children know that their report cards are held up to scrutiny, and that their performance on a sports field or stage is important to you. Don’t intensify the pressure with excessive demands.

- Develop interests beyond those involving your child.

If you have other things to occupy your time and mind, that will make following these suggestions easier and help to ensure a singleton’s happy childhood and success as an adult.

Kids need to be careful what they post online

My son will graduate from college in May and he has already started going to career expos to meet prospective employers and give them his resume. I’ve asked him to also remove any of his web posts that an employer might see as objectionable—and he thinks I’m being paranoid.

—L.M., Atlanta

Your concerns are well founded, and the career counselors on your son’s campus—who typically sponsor those expos—will give him the same advice. Many companies and graduate schools use search engines to conduct background checks on applicants.

Text and pictures posted on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, personal blogs and other social media platforms may seem hilarious or cool to a college or high school student’s friends, but they could make a job applicant appear immature, at the very least.

Provocative photos and comments about drinking, smoking marijuana, wild parties and highly personal behavior may be seen as red flags that could make the difference in a competitive situation.

Many young people think of cyberspace as their own, especially if they’ve used a website’s privacy settings. But, as we have all seen, personal privacies can very easily become public. And while some companies have said they are not interested in this type of information about a prospective employee, others are.

The growing ease of digital access to individuals with knowhow also makes this kind of research about a job applicant more likely, not less, to happen in the future.

Unfortunately, a young person might not even realize that he or she was passed over because someone in HR saw something on the Internet as part of a vetting process. So job applicants are well advised to review all of their pages and remove any materials that are inappropriate.

RESEARCH REVIEW

Older people can form healthy new bonds

Nearly half of women over age 75 (and one out of four men) live alone, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Many have lost their spouse and/or friends they’ve known all their lives.

But a growing number of seniors have discovered that, even at advanced ages, new relationships can take root, and a growing tide of research suggests the importance of forming such new bonds.

Researchers at the University of California, San Francisco have documented the toll of loneliness and social isolation on older people both physically and psychologically. They suffer higher mortality rates and increased risk of depression, cognitive decline and coronary artery disease.

Studies have also found connections between loneliness and higher blood pressure, nursing home admissions and unhealthy behaviors such as inactivity and smoking.

Other, more heartening, research has shown the importance of making new friends. For example, older people have benefited from moving to retirement communities and nursing homes, the destinations many of them had hoped to avoid. Their new communities provide proximity, shared activities and a large new pool of prospective friends.

“With strong evidence, friendship does, indeed, help save lives and promote health,” says Paula Span, author of When the Time Comes, who also writes the New Old Age blog for The New York Times. “Social workers and researchers wish we could pay more attention to its central role. Are there better ways to help elders stay in touch with the friends they care about, or meet new ones? We’re all willing to drive relatives to doctors’ appointments. Driving them to spend time with friends may matter as much.”

Interestingly, a big plus for older adults is that they tend to have developed good relationship skills over the years, according to Rosemary Blieszner, PhD, a distinguished professor of human development at Virginia Tech University and a long-time friendship researcher.

“Older adults are pretty tolerant of their friends’ imperfections and idiosyncrasies—more than young adults,” she says. “You bring a lot more experience to your friendships when you’re older. You know what’s worth fighting about and what’s not worth fighting about.”

Talking a good game can make a difference

A British study reported in the journal Frontiers in Psychology suggests that telling yourself you can do better on cognitive tasks can actually help you do just that. The study involved more than 44,000 participants in an online program. Researchers tested their psychological skills across different aspects of a task. They found that performance improved the most when participants used encouraging self-talk: for example, when they told themselves they could beat their best outcome.

Yet another technique, imagery, was also found to be helpful in situations when study participants pictured themselves reacting more quickly.

Of course, an even surer result of a good performance on a test is study and preparation.

This is your column. We invite you to send questions about work and family life or tell us how you solved a problem that you think a lot of people face. Write Dr. Susan Ginsberg, Work & Family Life, 305 Madison Ave., Suite 1143, NY, NY 10165. Email: workfam@aol.com.

Elun Golinsky, MS, Executive Editor of Work & Family Life, is President of the Families and Work Institute, a researcher on national and international studies, and author of more than 40 books and reports including “Mind in the Making” (HarperCollins). Susan Ginsberg EdD, Editor & Publisher of Work & Family Life, was Associate Dean at Bank Street College. She is the author of “Family Wisdom: The 2000 Most Important Things Ever Said about Parenting, Children and Family Life” (Columbia University Press).
No pain, no gain is the key to becoming a ‘super-ager’

By Anne Perryman

How is it that some people stay mentally nimble well into their 70s, 80s and 90s while others decline? As our population ages and lifespans lengthen, we need to ask the question: “What, if anything, can we do to stay sharp in old age?”

For some clues, neuroscientists at many institutions have begun to study the so-called super-agers among us—those older people whose cognitive abilities are very similar to those of much younger people. What are these people doing to prevent normal age-related declines in their memory and thinking skills?

A retirement-age cohort

Previous super-aging studies have focused mainly on people well into their 80s. Now researchers at Harvard and Massachusetts General Hospital are using MRI brain scans of people in their 60s and 70s, retirement age, whose memories are working as well as people in their 20s. Their preliminary findings were published recently in the Journal of Neuroscience.

“We looked at brain areas associated with the ability to learn and remember new information,” says Lisa Feldman Barrett, PhD of Mass General and Northeastern University. “We found that those areas were thicker in super-agers than in other older adults. In some cases, there was no difference in thickness between super-agers and young adults.”

The super-agers in their study also showed no shrinkage in a key hub in human brain circuitry that allows different networks to communicate efficiently.

A deeper understanding of the factors that protect against mental decline could lead to advances in treating age-related memory loss and even various forms of dementia. It could also help all of us prepare for healthier lives in old age.

But that’s not what the new research at Mass General has found. Nearly all the critical action is happening in the so-called “emotional” regions of the brain.

In other words, areas once believed to be “emotional” are actually major communication hubs that also handle language, stress, the regulation of internal organs and coordination of the five senses into a cohesive experience. “And, like a muscle, if these regions do not get a workout they degrade,” says Dr. Barrett, author of the forthcoming book How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain.

What we can do

There is apparently no clear path to becoming a super-ager because of genetics, life style and all sorts of human variables. But, at this point, it looks like strenuous, hard work may be the secret. Studies have shown that specific areas of the brain that need exercise are more active when we do difficult mental or physical tasks.

“Doing crossword puzzles and walking an hour a day is not what we’re talking about,” Dr. Barrett says. “We’re talking about dedicating everything you’ve got to a task. It needs to hurt. When these regions of the brain are getting a workout, you will feel tired, stressed, frustrated—and that’s how you know it’s working.”

The Marine Corps motto that “pain is weakness leaving the body” seems appropriate to super-agers. The very real discomfort of exertion means that you are building muscle and discipline.

In a way, super-agers are like Marines—in their determination to push past the temporary unpleasantness of an intense effort.

No time to take it easy

The trouble is, making this kind of commitment runs counter to the way most of us want to live as older people. We tend to be more concerned with cultivating our happiness and avoiding situations that are unpleasant. We’d like to just take it easy.

But all of the new research suggests that sidestepping the discomfort of mental effort and physical exertion is detrimental to the brain. Brain tissue gets thinner from disuse. The old saying is true: “If you don’t use it, you lose it.”

What we should be doing is something physically or mentally challenging. Learn a foreign language. Take a college course (check out senior auditor opportunities). Return to the musical instrument you studied as a kid. Get on a treadmill. Join a yoga class. All of these activities will strengthen the aging brain.

“Not everyone can be a super-ager,” according to Susan Krauss Whitbourne, PhD, who blogs for Psychology Today. “But, by trying, you will make your chances that much more likely for becoming a successful brain-ager.” Check out her blog at www.psychologytoday.com/blog/fulfillment-any-age.

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Super-agers study at Northwestern

Scientists at Northwestern University’s Cognitive Neurology and Alzheimer’s Disease Center have a grant from the National Institutes of Health to continue their research on super-agers. They are actively recruiting study participants who are 80 years or older with exceptional memories and cognitive abilities.

Candidates are given a baseline evaluation, MRI brain scan and detailed medical and family histories. For example, in one test candidates are asked to read a list of 12 unrelated words and asked to recall those words 20 minutes later. Some of the initial tests are conducted over the phone, like reciting the alphabet and numbers backward and forward.

If you have an older relative or friend who might be a candidate for super-ager research, contact the study coordinator at (312) 503-2716 or agingresearch@northwestern.edu.

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Running a marathon in Des Moines.
What to do if your child is a fussy eater

By Linda Piette, MS, RD

While fussy eating is both common and normal in young children, some of them take it to extremes, eating only a few select foods.

More typical are kids who will eat chicken nuggets in a restaurant but not at home, who eat fruits but not vegetables, who drink juice but not milk. Variations are endless, depending on individual children, their personality and life experience, their age and stage of development.

For young children, eating is not solely about food or nourishment. Meals are a setting for physical and social development. Kids learn whether eating is pleasant or unpleasant and the consequences of eating or not eating.

They watch and listen and become quickly aware of the social rules and expectations surrounding food. They also develop their own likes and dislikes.

How things have changed

The basics of eating remain the same, but over the years other factors have changed our relationship with food. Our grandmothers could not buy yogurt in plastic squeeze pouches or drive through a fast food restaurant on the way to a soccer game. These new options change what, how and sometimes why we eat—especially for kids.

It’s easy and understandable to worry so much about what a child eats that we may forget about how. But part of the picky-eating solution is looking beyond the quality and quantity of the food a child eats to the dynamics around mealtime.

Here are some ideas to help you avoid some common mealtime pitfalls:

Offer small portions. Large portions don’t help underweight kids eat more. In fact, they seem to overwhelm all young children.

Encouraging your child to ask for more food promotes verbal communication and gives her or him a sense of empowerment.

Avoid continual grazing. It typically results in children not being hungry for meals. When a child sips juice and other drinks all day, the odds are that she or he will be a poor eater. Even wholesome drinks add up. What’s too much? Each day, no more than 4–6 ounces of juice and 32 ounces of milk.

Don’t be coercive. Bribes, rewards and punishments may work in the short run, but in the long run they tend to make matters worse. Do not use food as a reward—or a punishment. Avoid saying things like, “When you finish your peas, you can have some dessert.” This teaches children that sweets are a reward for eating vegetables—not a great message.

Avoid long mealtimes. It may be a sign that you’re putting too much energy in trying to get a young child to eat. Don’t coax or coddle. Put all the food at once. And do not let your child watch TV or a video or play with toys at mealtime. Limit mealtime interruptions and put food away after about 30 minutes.

See throwing food as a sign that eating is over. If it happens, food should be removed in a matter-of-fact way. With young toddlers, you might say, “Bye, bye food” and take it away. The goal is not to punish but to give your child the message that if food is thrown, it goes away. Look for and accept early signs that your child is done eating to avoid thrown food.

Help kids recognize hunger and fullness. Children need to learn to eat for their own well-being, not to please or displease a parent. Help kids understand that their bodies will signal hunger and fullness—and to not confuse these physical sensations with emotional feelings. Try not to get too upset over food refusals. You don’t want to send the message that “I won’t love you if you don’t eat your carrots.”

Consider your food messages. If you offer kids something new after they have rejected a food, you’re rewarding their refusal. They learn, “If I say no, I might get something I like better.”

So, if your toddler refuses a waffle, don’t offer a pancake. Give kids simple choices, such as “Do you want cereal or scrambled eggs?” Be firm about not providing new foods after a refusal will ultimately help your child become less fussy and eat more.

How to improve mealtime dynamics

Set limits in a clear, consistent, nice way. Family dining rules are necessary, of course, but try to make as few as possible to limit the number of battles, especially for toddlers.

Be flexible. Young kids alternate between needing support and needing limits. To support independence, a good rule is to give children help only when they need it. Think about what else is happening in a child’s life. Has her nap schedule changed? Is he more clingy than usual?

Limit kids’ food choices. Allowing too many choices opens the door to challenges. If a five year old says “Yuk” and makes a face at every new food on his plate, a parent might make a rule: “You can’t say that you don’t like a food before you taste it.”

Be patient. Even if you follow the rules and your child is still a picky eater, persevere. Don’t worry about what a child eats at each meal. Look at it over a day or a week. Hunger almost always leads kids to eat. Holding out can help a child recognize subtle sensations of hunger rather than the social reactions their food refusals elicit.

—Adapted from the author’s book “Just Two More Bites” (Three Rivers Press).
Getting a new work team off the ground

By Bruce Tulgan

If you are a new leader, no matter how much experience you bring to the table, you’re likely to be challenged by the situation you find yourself in now.

You may be transitioning from being a peer to being a leader. You may be coming from the outside to take over an existing team. You may be bringing together a new team, or you may be welcoming a new member to an existing team.

Organizing a new team

Let’s say, for instance, that a brand new team is being formed at your workplace. The team members don’t know each other. You did not choose them. And you may not be sure how long the team will exist. This could happen in a start-up company, department, work group or a new project.

Your new team has a lot of work that needs to be done very well and very fast. You may have standard operating procedures to guide you but, for the most part, your team has not yet established habits or norms of interaction.

Everyone on your team will be wondering who you are. “What are your plans?” “How will you manage?” And “What will it all mean for me?”

What do you do? Where do you start? With a new team you have no baggage. You have a rare chance to get things going very well from the onset.

Some pitfalls to avoid

“Hit the ground running” sounds great. But without coordination, people tend to run off in their own directions. Another strategy is to focus on what team members have in common outside of work. While this emphasis is laudable, it fails to explore how well individuals are likely to work together and confront issues on the job.

Similarly, valuable team building exercises can be a distraction in this situation. Everyone needs to get to know each other in terms of who each person is on the job.

So your goal, as manager, is to help each person know where he or she fits into the larger picture with everyone on the same page, ready to move forward as a team.

The first team meeting

Introduce yourself. Then facilitate an introductory process that focuses on “Who I am at work.”

Ask team members to introduce themselves and describe their portfolio of experiences and skills. For example: “This is what I can do. This is how I operate. These are my work habits. And this is the commitment I am willing to make to this team.”

These introductions will work better if people have a chance to prepare their own brief self-assessment in advance.

Many organizations use self-assessment tools. So, it helps to ask participants if they’ve gone through this process before. If they have, ask: “What did you learn about yourself from that assessment that will help others work better with you?”

More key questions

The next key question: “What do team members need to know about you that will help them work better with you?”

Encourage authenticity, and don’t pretend to be something you’re not. But present your best self and hold yourself to a high standard.

After team members have offered the group their self-assessment, it can be productive to pair them off in twos (with one trio if necessary). Ask them to interview each other based on the self-assessments they have just heard. Then ask each pair to introduce each other to the group.

Next steps

It’s a good idea to end the initial meeting with a list of unanswered questions. Brainstorm with everyone at the table: “What don’t we know that we need to know to make a smarter plan for our work as a team?”

Everyone should be involved in intelligence-gathering for the next meeting, and the focus of that meeting should be: “What have we been able to learn?”

Your challenge now is to clarify individual roles and responsibilities for each member of the team. Your job as the leader is to figure out how to make the best use of each person and determine how they will work in concert with each other.

This means that you need to do your best due diligence on each team member before you assign roles and responsibilities. Resumes, letters of recommendation and prior project reviews are all useful. In the absence of that kind of information, you might consider an interview style one-on-one with each member of the team between your first and the second meetings.

Bringing it all together

By your third team meeting, you should be clear as to what role each person is going to play, who is expected to do what—and how, where and when that will happen.

Continue to meet with people individually. Spell out your expectations, follow up, provide feedback, trouble-shoot and correct course when necessary. And keep meeting as a team where there are conversations in which everyone needs to participate.

As your new team moves forward

Keep meeting regularly with each team member. As you continue to monitor, measure and document, ask yourself these questions:

Who needs to be managed more closely?
Who needs more responsibility and autonomy?
Who needs help with the fundamentals of self-management?
Who needs performance coaching to speed up or slow down?
Who has a great attitude and who needs an attitude adjustment?
Who needs help navigating the complex, ever-changing workplace?

In our noisy world, how loud is too loud?

Prolonged exposure to any noise at or above 85 decibels can cause gradual hearing loss. And regular exposure of more than one minute at a time at or above the level of 110 decibels risks permanent hearing loss.

Here are the decibel levels of some of the common noises in our lives from the Center for Science in the Public Interest:

- **85 decibels.** Heavy city traffic, school cafeteria.
- **90 decibels.** Power lawn mower.
- **100 decibels.** Woodshop tools, snowmobile.
- **105 decibels.** Personal stereo played at maximum level.
- **110 decibels.** Rock music concert, symphony orchestra.
- **120 decibels.** Ambulance siren.
- **140 decibels.** A jet plane taking off.
- **140-165 decibels.** Firecracker, shotgun firing.

Among the low-decibel activities:

- **0 decibels.** The smallest sound a person with normal hearing can detect.
- **30 decibels.** A whisper.
- **40 decibels.** Refrigerator.
- **60 decibels.** A normal conversation.
- **75 decibels.** Dishwasher.

Did you know...

That the best way to neutralize garlic breath is to eat some raw apple, raw lettuce or mint leaves. Less effective, recent studies have found, were heated foods and juices—and green tea was no better than water.

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Easy ways to eat healthier this year

Many of us resolved to eat better (and less) in the new year. But unrealistic goals can set us up for failure, says *Consumer Reports on Health*. A more realistic approach is to make a few less daunting tweaks.

“You have so many diet choices to make every day,” says psychologist Lesley Lutes, PhD of the University of British Columbia. “Even if you make a change only some of the time, the benefits add up.”

A study at the University of South Australia supports this strategy. Researchers found that replacing just 25 percent of “discretionary foods” (desserts, snacks and sugary drinks) with healthy foods made a huge improvement in overall diet quality. It could be something as simple as trading a few cookies for a piece of fruit.

Here are six strategies to try:

- **Eat healthy foods that you like.**
  A Baylor University study found that switching from “avoidance” to “approach” foods is helpful. For example, if you hate kale, eat a big bowl of fresh berries—and you may no longer want that piece of cake.

- **Replace one sugary drink a day with water.**
  Check out your juice intake, too. Fruit juices contribute a lot of calories and sugar. Limit yourself to a small (4-ounce) glass a day.

- **Eat your veggies first.**
  Make them a first course. Traci Mann, PhD, author of *Secrets From the Eating Lab*, suggests: “Make a salad and sit down to eat it before you put any other food on the table. You’ll eat more vegetables and…less later in the meal.”

- **Go meatless one day a week.**
  A study in *JAMA Internal Medicine* reported health benefits from replacing animal protein with plant protein. Swap your burger for a veggie version or make a hearty meatless chili.

- **Make a small snack more satisfying.**
  A Cornell University food lab study found that if you eat just a quarter of your usual snack, then do something distracting for 15 minutes (return a phone call or take a walk), you’ll feel as full and satisfied as if you’d eaten it all.

- **Be grateful.**
  When you’re in a bad mood, you’re more likely to eat unhealthy foods. But a recent study, also at Cornell, found that improving your mood—even a little bit—may lead to healthier eating. But how do you do that?

  “Right before serving themselves a meal, we asked people to think of one positive thing that had happened that day that they were grateful for,” says Brian Wansink, PhD, food lab director at Cornell and author of *Slim by Design*. “Those who did ate 9 percent fewer calories at that meal and chose a healthier mix of foods that included more vegetables and fewer processed carbs.”

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What’s so good about mushrooms?

Most of us eat mushrooms rather sparingly, but that number has been rising gradually—which is a good thing, nutritionists say.

Popular varieties include white button, portobello, enoki, maitake, chanterelle, morel and shiitake.

Mushrooms are actually fungi, but they count toward the recommended 2-3 cups of veggies a day. Here’s what we’ve learned about mushrooms’ nutritional content.

**Mushrooms are nutritious.**
They are a low-calorie source of B vitamins, potassium, magnesium, selenium, zinc, copper and vitamin D. They contain healthy chemicals, compounds and fiber.

**They’re best cooked.**
Cooking releases healthy compounds and destroys some potentially harmful ones. It boosts mushrooms’ earthy, aromatic flavors and tastes.

**They’re used medicinally.**
Like many plants, mushrooms contain antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and blood sugar lowering properties.

**Don’t eat them wild**, unless you know what you’re doing. Some varieties are poisonous—and cooking does not make them safe.

**Store them correctly.**
Put in a loosely closed paper bag or shallow dish covered with a lightly moistened paper towel. Store dried varieties in a cool, dark place.

**Don’t prep** until right before you use them. Trim off the stem end. Wipe with a damp cloth or rinse quickly. Don’t soak them.

**Cook in a little water,** oil or broth or grill them. Add raw or cooked to omelets, salads, stews and stir fries.

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Blend with meat.**
Chopped mushrooms can replace half of the ground meat in burgers, taco filling, chili and meatloaf. This cuts calories and fat and reduces the need for salt.

——Adapted from the UC Berkeley Wellness Letter
You’ve gotta keep your sense of humor, right?

“You have to love your kids, embrace the madness, find the humor, create your own entertainment and laugh together—even in your worst parenting moments. In fact, that’s when things are the most hilarious.”

The creator of a popular blog, Ilana Wiles, says she’s not a great mother. She’s not a terrible mother either, so she calls her new book The Mommy Shorts Guide to Remarkably Average Parenting.

This book is for parents (and parents-to-be) who know parenting is tough but still believe they can have a pretty good time. It’s a wonderful way to lighten up and laugh at the craziness of it all. Once the baby is born, Wiles offers instructions on “The 10 Phases of taking a shower with a newborn in the house from Minute 1 to Minute 10.”

She shares her two-year-old’s rules for eating a banana and describes the range of emotions one experiences when bringing a baby on a plane.

She asks, “What is it about having a baby that gives a complete stranger the right to act like your mother?”

She calls the new mother’s reaction to unsolicited advice the New Mom Insecurity Syndrome.

“When someone offers to help you, you think they are implying that you can’t do it yourself,” she writes. “When someone seems surprised that you’re going back to work, you hear ‘How sad that someone else will raise your child’.”

There are photographs of children on almost every page, and they are charming and funny—as is the entire book.

The Mommy Shorts Guide to Remarkably Average Parenting (Abrams Image) is available in bookstores and online in hardcover and Kindle editions.