



Media release

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Family dinners, backyard play and bedtime stories: researchers call for a simpler approach to children's health and wellbeing in 2019

Australian children today have the potential to live longer, happier and healthier lives than generations gone before them - but it will be an opportunity squandered unless parents embrace a simpler, more wholistic approach to children's health and wellbeing, according to a new report unveiled by the University of Notre Dame Sydney.

The *Little People, Big Lives* report, commissioned by Sanitarium Health Food Company, calls on parents to refocus on the big picture when it comes to childhood health and combating emerging risks such as obesity, type 2 diabetes and mental health issues. The literature review collates its findings and practical recommendations into five critical action areas: Safety, Security, Love & Belonging; Healthy Eating & Drinking; Active Play; Healthy Sleep; and Positive Screen Time. Researchers point out significant interplay between the action areas and advise parents not to look at them in isolation.

Professor Christine Bennett AO, Dean of Medicine at The University Notre Dame, who led the team in developing the report, said: "To combat the big emerging threats facing Aussie kids including obesity, type 2 diabetes and mental health issues, we need to take a wholistic view on our health. It's not about 'quick fix solutions', but rather going back to basics. Healthy eating and physical activity are important but there's more we need for a healthy start to life.

"Active play, good sleep, limiting screen time, love and care, are all vital to a child's positive self-worth and social connection.



“Spending time without technology - making time to eat together as a family, as well as play, sing, dance and read are all critical to childhood. Many parents will be interested to know these simple activities have the potential to be powerful contributors to their child’s physical health and emotional wellbeing, with evolving scientific evidence supporting why we need to take a holistic view of health.”

Ada Nicodemou, Aussie actress, mother and ambassador for the *Little People Big Lives* campaign, believes it’s time to take a step back and look at what really adds the most value to our children’s lives.

“Parenting isn’t rocket science, although with all the information we’re bombarded with, it can sometimes feel that way. What I love about this report is that it demonstrates kids need what they have always had – love, care, encouragement, playtime and movement, nutritious food as well as restful sleep. Taking a step back from the noise today, giving our kids the best start in life doesn’t seem so complicated anymore.

Family life: Key statistics²

- On average, parents spend 9.3 hours dedicated time with their children each week. Conversely, children spend 14.6 hours each week being entertained by screens (watching TV and gaming).
- Screen time is the leading cause of broken or inadequate sleep for one in four (26%) 12-15 year olds.
- Nearly half (45%) of children not spending any time walking to school.
- Most Aussie children play little part in what gets on to their dinner plate, with almost



"I'm the first to admit family life is incredibly busy, that's why the practical recommendations in this report resonate with me. It's the little things like family dinners, playing in the backyard and one-on-one conversations before bedtime that set up our kids for a lifetime of good physical and mental health. And we all have time for that!"

two-thirds uninvolved in meal selection, food preparation or grocery shopping.

A YouGov Galaxy research study, commissioned by Sanitarium in support of the *Little People, Big Lives* report, has uncovered a number of trends in Australian family activity, which highlight opportunities to improve children's health and wellbeing through simple everyday habits.

With half of Australian children not spending any time walking to school², the report highlights that while this activity may seem relatively insignificant, it can play a critical role in improving health and wellbeing. While parking an extra 10 minutes away can incidentally add an extra 1.5 hours to a child's weekly physical activity levels, walking to school also provides an opportunity for parents to build stronger connections with their children, improving their wellbeing.

The YouGov Galaxy research study also found Aussie children are disengaged in their eating habits. In the kitchen, few children (37%) are involved in meal preparation. When it comes to meal-time, more than half of children (57%) eat at least one meal a week looking at an electronic device, and for one in five (18%) this extends to most meals. The report recommends reinvigoration of the family meal to strengthen social connection and suggests 'gamifying' meal time to help stimulate children's nutritional imagination.

To read the report, learn more about the five action areas and practical tips to simplify your family's approach to health and wellbeing visit Sanitarium's *Little People, Big Lives* microsite at <http://www.sanitarium.com.au/biglives>.

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