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SPOUSES, CHILDREN AND ROOMMATES

By J. Morris Hicks

Without a doubt, the single biggest obstacle to fully embracing the whole food, plant-based 4Leaf lifestyle is an unsupportive spouse or significant other. And that is why Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn will not accept new heart-disease reversal patients in his program unless their spouses accompany them to the initial training and orientation sessions at the Wellness Institute of The Cleveland Clinic.

Does this mean that you should drop the whole idea if your spouse is not on board? No, but it's going to take more time. You'll need that time to do everything within your power to help him/her understand why you are so excited about embracing this revolutionary way of eating. Regardless of how much time it takes, it will be well worth it. After all, what could be more important than vibrant health for both of you?

Can you make the change on your own? Yes, but it's much easier for a single person to do this than it is for someone who is married to an unsupportive spouse. That's because when you make a change in the way you are eating, you are

affecting a significant portion of the waking hours you spend together. And that is a VERY big deal. Also, your spouse may very well be the person who does all the shopping and/or the cooking.

To be sure, this new adventure will be much more rewarding if you are both on the same page. Hence, you should do all that you can to start this life-changing journey together. As you share reading material and gently urge your spouse to join you, you should always be respectful as you appeal for his/her priceless support.

At the end of the day, a delicately balanced combination of listening, supporting, loving, understanding and caring will probably be the most convincing. As I said, this process may take some time so just be prepared to be patient. The stakes are high and they deserve your very best efforts.

What about the children? Teaching them a powerful, health-promoting way of eating while they are young is undoubtedly the best lifetime gift that you could possibly give them. It basically means that you're empowering them and all those who follow--with the ability to avoid chronic disease and live a long, healthy and happy life. But it won't be easy with barriers like these on the typical kids menu:

Menu Item	Fat %	Cholesterol	Fiber
Cheeseburger	32%	40 mg	1g
Cheese Pizza	43%	10 mg	1g
Chicken Nuggets	53%	34 mg	0
Mac & Cheese	40%	10 mg	1g

The good news is that it's not that difficult to change their habits if they're five or under. Unfortunately, your task will become increasingly more difficult as they grow older. It's also much easier if you don't have to share the children with unsupportive ex-spouses.

Consider cutting yourself some slack. Everyone loves their children and wants the best for them, yet there are times when we are just unable to get them to embrace a health-promoting diet, despite our best efforts. If the barriers are just too many and too high when it comes to your kids, Kerry and I recommend that you not be too hard on yourself.

While your kids may not choose to embrace your new diet-style as soon as you would like, there's no need to add unnecessary stress to your own lives by trying to force the issue too soon. Just model the behavior that you would like for them to adopt. Then, when they're old enough to decide for themselves, you will have raised the chances that they will make the right choices.

Then, there's everyone else. You may have other family, friends or roommates who share your living space. While there may be some awkward moments at first, this will be a breeze compared to the challenges you will face in the first two categories of relationships.

Certainly, you should offer to help them understand the incredible benefits of the diet you have adopted. But if they're not interested, just pretend that you are living alone as far as eating is concerned. Quietly, go about taking care of your own needs and never criticize them. If they ever want your help or advice, they will ask for it.

One final word on relationships. If you're fortunate enough to have a spouse or life partner who greatly enjoys eating the same way you do, you'll find that it can really be a lot of fun and may even be instrumental in taking your relationship to a whole new level.