



Interview with Mrs. Shira Francis

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist

Topics covered:

-Getting the family on board with nutrition changes

-How to handle the overwhelming amount of information and opinions in the world of nutrition

-Chizuk regarding the financial aspect of increasing your nutrition standards

GETTING ON BOARD

Jessica Zimmerman-

Hi, Shira, thank you so much for agreeing to do this interview and sharing your knowledge and expertise with our Nourish to Flourish audience! Shira has a masters in special education and is a licensed marriage and family therapist. She has a busy private practice, a teleconference series, and is a sought after speaker.

Shira, many women were inspired by our Nourish to Flourish event, but need some guidance on how to get the rest of the family on board, particularly older kids.

Shira Francis-

Anytime there's a value that parents want to give over to their children, the work begins with the parents owning it themselves. We can't transmit something to our children that we have not acquired for ourselves. Now it doesn't mean that we have to be excelling in that value, but it has to be meaningful to us in order to give it over.

We can try to tell our children to do things, but if the value isn't being held by the authority figures in the home, it is very unlikely that they will internalize it and be comfortable owning it themselves. So when we talk about expanding the value of healthy eating and nutrition and overall well-being, whether it's younger children or older children, it's not possible to give it over if the parents themselves are doing things that are very contradictory to it.

We have to recognize that working to be a nutritious, nourishing, healthy home starts with the parents working on themselves, and that's going to be different for every person. Each family, according to their style, has to make decisions about how they can make changes to start transmitting this value. Whether it means not bringing soda into the home, or being more careful with food coloring and preservatives, or if it means serving dinners that have more of a balance, or switching out the type of flour that you're using, or fruits and vegetables becoming snacks instead of candy and chips, etc.

Not only do the changes have to be made, the changes have to be talked about. Particularly when we're talking about older children who tend to be more resistant to being told what to do. It's helpful when parents discuss out loud what they're doing and why they're doing it.

How do you handle older children, assuming that they haven't been raised with this value and now the parents want to transition?

There has to be a lot of dialogue. Teenagers don't like to feel like they're being squashed into a box or put into a straight jacket; they appreciate being spoken to maturely and reasonably.

This requires a lot of dialogue and role modeling by the parents. For example, what would you say to a 14-year-old girl? On a Sunday afternoon you could say, "You know what? Instead of picking up pizza, like we always do on Sunday, I'm going to make myself a big, yummy salad. I'm gonna put in some salmon that we have from Shabbos and I'm going to make a homemade dressing from the new cookbook that we got."

You might say to her something like "Do you want to join me?"

The girl might roll her eyes and say, "Don't be so extreme," and then mom can just say,

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I think it's really important. I want to start working on eating more healthy. I think I'm going to really feel better, in general people feel better and have more energy when they eat well. You're welcome to join me if you want." So the idea is that you're not imposing. When there's constant dialogue and the relationship with a child is not dependent on if they listen to the specific thing or not, you're opening a pathway for them to be more engaged.

Another suggestion aside from modeling and talking out loud is to include them in the adventure of it:

Let's say a teenage boy who's home from yeshiva and who likes to go to Jewel to pick up food to bring back to yeshiva for snack. You can say something along the lines of, "Hey, I know we usually go to Jewel, but someone told me that Trader Joe's is a store that has great, delicious snacks, with lots of variety, and some healthier choices. I want to go to get some stuff for the family. Do you want to come along and see if there is stuff there that you want to bring back to yeshiva?" So you're including him in the process.

If it were a girl, it would sound something more along the lines of, "You know, I got a new cookbook that has some really healthy recipes in it. Do you want to come grocery shopping with me and let's see if we can get some ingredients to make some new recipes?" Or you can buy a new cookbook and go through it with your daughters and decide what looks good and what to avoid. When you engage them and they are participating in the fun that's another way to have to have them be part of it.

For some kids it can be good to talk about it in a very practical and logical way. Let's say a 15- year-old boy is starting to have stomach aches, he's feeling very lethargic, and he can't concentrate well in yeshiva. This might be an opportunity for a parent to dialogue with a child. "I've been looking into the subject, I'm making some changes myself. I learned that sugar and white flour really creates a sugar spike in the system and then there's a crash which will make you exhausted. It could be that white flour is having an impact on you and getting in your way."

If you have a girl who is a little weight conscious, not that we hyper focus on body size, but let's say she says herself, "I just feel like my clothes aren't fitting me". Try saying something like, "I'd be so happy to help you with some food choices. I think people feel better about their body when they put healthy food in their body".

You can give more scientific information or practical information. You have to know your kid. Some kids will roll their eyes and walk away. Some kids will be curious to hear this. Some kids will appreciate reading a book or listening to a podcast on it. Some kids are not interested at all.

Let's talk about those kids. Now I'm going to just point out here, a lot of times when kids are eye rolling and stomping and mocking their parents' suggestions, this is probably a part of the bigger picture. They might be in an active or passive power struggle, or there may be a lot of misunderstandings or resentment. That dynamic has to be addressed in a more general way.

We want to pick our fights; we want to set limits and areas that we feel are realistic to follow through on; we want to work really hard to bring positive energy into the relationship.

So, if someone has a relationship with a teenager, that sounds like what I just described, remember that these ideas would apply with nutrition. Bow out of power struggles. Offer the options without insisting on it. You give them space to make their own choices. Avoid picking fights about things that you know will escalate, and decide where to put your foot down. That's going to be unique to every parent. Parents are the authority figures in the home, so we do have to make certain lines that don't get crossed in our home.

JZ-

What about husbands, what if they aren't on the same page as their wife?

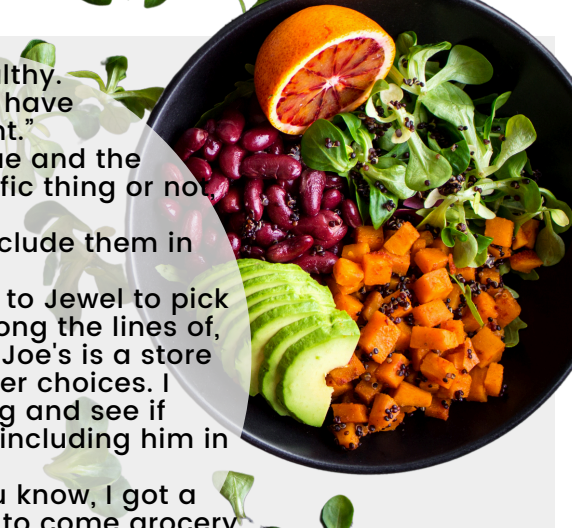
SF-

When it comes to husbands the same principle applies. The reality is you cannot have a husband who's doing things that you're telling your kids not to do. If they do, then you have to realize it's going to be much harder to convey the value to your child. It's going to be a very delicate balance between being respectful and demonstrating shalom bayis to your children, which is arguably more important than giving over the value of nutrition. Let's break it down:

The most ideal situation would be if husband and wife are on the same page. When I say on the same page, I don't mean they have to do the exact same thing. Kids are allowed to see that their parents are different from each other and that's something that people sometimes misunderstand.

A happy home does not mean that husband and wife are clones of one another and do everything and say everything exactly the same. Children need to see that the parents respect each other even if they're different, as long as they're not actively giving contradictory messages. It's unhealthy for the family if they're clearly in conflict.

If a couple decides they want to make some changes, and mom decides that she only wants to eat whole-grain flour all the time and dad says he is going to do whole-grain flour during the week, but on Shabbos he still wants to have white challah, mom can say to the children,



"This is so hard for Tatty, but it's amazing. He's doing whole wheat for six days and one day he has white flour." Nutrition is not all or nothing, whatever you can do is good. If the mother has established a value of healthy eating and the father is completely not in agreement with her, creating a conflict between them, then you have a problem that you have to address the same way you address any marital problems.

OVERWHELMING OPINIONS



JZ-
Can you please expand more on the fact that there are so many opinions in the field of nutrition, how can a person/family pick what works for them?

SF-
This question doesn't just apply to nutrition. What if a family is coming closer to Yiddishkeit? There are a lot of different ways of serving Hashem. They would need to do some research, choose a Rav, visit communities, and see what speaks to them and what feels right.

If we're looking at nutrition as a value, if you want to improve, you have to do some of your own research. You have to pick a person or a group that you trust that you'll follow. Follow what feels right to your brain, to your knowledge, to your family history, to the research that you've done, and then you follow that.

**"Hashem is
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Let's remember that eating healthy and being nutritious in general is a hishtadlus. It's a way to take care of the bodies Hashem has given us, to *iy"v* serve him from a place of health. Hashem is in charge of our health. When we look at it that way, it brings much more peace to our efforts. The same as parnassa - you do your hishtadlus, and trust that the rest is in Hashem's hands.

At the end of the day, if you know your health is in the hands of Hashem then you can relax. The only ultimate truth is what the Torah says. The book you gave out at the event is an amazing book (To Your Health by Yechezkel Ishayek), it talks about the sources of nutrition in the Torah. Anything not sourced in Torah is a matter of opinion, perspective experience, maybe some scientific research, but every scientific research has a counter research. Speak to people that you trust and that you connect to, experiment with things for yourself and your children. Sometimes it's trial and error and you may realize things aren't working for your family and then you do more research, but remember that Hashem is in charge of the outcome. He can choose to make people who are very nutritious unwell and He can make people who eat garbage all the time stay healthy. The ultimate truth is in the Torah; everything else is a matter of what is the appropriate hishtadlus for you.

JZ-
Can you please speak to the financial investment that eating healthy necessitates? It is definitely hard for many frum families to keep up with the expense of healthy food.

SF-
1. Everything is in Hashem's hands, but generally people who are more careful with nutrition and health tend to spend much less money on medical bills. You might be spending more money on food, but you're saving money on all the interventions that you have to do to undo the damage of the unhealthy food because they are doing proactive medicine instead of "corrective surgery".

2. Every family chooses to spend money on things that they feel are important. We spend much more money on kosher chicken than non-kosher chicken, because we believe that that's the right thing to do. None of us stands there in Jewel saying if only I could buy the non-kosher chicken. Of course I'm not equating that analogy with nutrition because that's a bit extreme, but just an analogy to think about. When you value nutrition, it becomes less of a choice. There are people that will be very hesitant to spend money on healthy food, but they'll spend it on a family trip or on making a simcha more lavish or on expensive presents. Remember that on Rosh Hashana Hashem decides how much money you're going to have. If you feel like you're spending money on something that Hashem wants you to spend money on, then you spend the money and you daven to Hashem for parnassa.

So yes your grocery bill will be more expensive, and if you think that's what Hashem wants from you, then don't worry about it. He's going to give you money, and you may choose to spend less on something else and more on nutrition. Ultimately it's bitachon. Relax and know that Hashem takes care of parnassa.

JZ-Thank you so much Shira for your time, I am sure your wise insight and practical advice will be a tremendous help to many of us!