

## The junk food compromise

I went on a ***change-your-diet-change-your-life*** kick, limiting all the snack, sweet, fast food, or junk foods from my family's diet. It was easier for me than you'd think because I was the only one buying groceries. I just didn't buy it anymore.

Just because something isn't available doesn't mean people won't miss it. I thought everyone would just decide that my way was the best way – then fall in line and eat their fruit without considering the chocolate that still sat on the grocery store shelves.

Boy, was I wrong.

My children are traditional junk foods kids. They use bad foods as their drug. There, I admit it. They have an addiction, so while a physical change in food availability may be real, my children's emotional change was a different story. I wanted to cut out the junk food for a long time, and I figured cold-turkey was the way to go. We'd become healthier and live happily ever after. A forced change.

But something went horribly wrong early on. Kids are resilient. They're as wily as those prisoners in old prison movies where cigarettes and nudie magazines are smuggled in from god-knows-where. Due to the intensity of that first week after I banished junk food, my kids cracked and started getting their supply from somewhere else. The difference was that they now felt the need to hide their sweets from me. Smuggling junk food behind my back.

Having them hide things from me made me feel like a horrible mom. My children, until this point, had been communicating with their troubles and joys, freely expressing their passions and longings. I know they kept secrets from me in the past, but never physically hiding things – not to mention hiding upset feelings.

By the second week of smuggling and hiding foods, I realized there would need to be another approach. Parenting 101 for me, I guess, but I finally got to the point where I understood kids have to be educated on the lifestyle change I wanted for them. Force won't work. By week two I sat them down and went over the following checklist, adapted from author [Charity Curley Mathews](#):

- Everyone over the age of 2 eats the same meal
- Mix the vegetables in things to get them to eat vegetables
- Small portions of the unhealthy stuff, and everyone eats the same amount
- Less packaged and fast-food
- Two snacks during the day (no more)
- We drink water or milk (I added juice on special occasions)

This means that we all had to eat together and choose good foods to eat. Understanding the need for a balance of protein, fruits, vegetables, grains and dairy is where I started.

But guess what? It didn't work. Well, not all the time anyway. Yes, we failed and we gave in to our kids, giving them junk food occasionally, but now we have a conversation about ideals. It's important for kids to be educated about the difference.

My decision to reintroduce junk food went wrong at first. But it was the best thing I ever did because they spent the next week eating horrible things. But the conversation finally came back around and I asked everyone to make an effort at the rules.

More and more, the conversations are about eating dinner with the family – their WANTING to eat with the family. They still ate a lot of sweets and junk foods, but they also understood and sought out dinner with healthy foods. I was pleased because little by little they choose to healthy foods. By the next week they weren't eating any sweets. They were not hiding foods either – at least I hope not!

But the point is that there should be no going "cold turkey" or forcing extreme changes on children without including them in the conversation. By posting shared values and failing at living up to them, we're finding a realistic compromise the honest compromise. It's good to have my family working together on their junk food addiction, not hiding it.