

When Gabrielle Welch starts talking about the importance of kids' nutrition, her passion is contagious. She aptly says she's speaking from her "pizza box," rather than her soapbox, as she discusses the pervasiveness of junk food.

"This is the first generation of children not expected to outlive their parents," said Welch, founder of Welch Wellness and author of *The Pizza Trap: Every Mom's Guide to Breaking Children's Dangerous Food Addictions, Ending Mealtime Battles and Building Healthy Habits for Life*. "It's only because of what kids are putting in their bodies. Period. One in three kids born in 2000 are expected to be diabetic by the time they're 18. That's my child. That's real."

Welch's eldest daughter is the reason she is in the nutrition business. She was born with chronic health issues, including asthma and eczema.

"They wanted her taking several medications, and I didn't see improvements in her health," Welch said. "She was three and would most likely have to take medications for her entire life. That wasn't the lifestyle I wanted for her. I realized early on we had to change our food and environment, so I looked at healing through food and taking out things that could exacerbate the problem. Her health improved dramatically. Food changes everything."

Seeing her daughter's health improve motivated Welch to start her own company in 2010.

"I realized there were a lot of people who suffered with the same problems," she said. "I had a nine-year journey discovering and reading and gathering all of this information. And I learned by default with my kids. For other families going through similar health struggles with their kids, I wanted there to be a guide out there for them."

Luckily, Welch had decided to get her MBA from Baylor early in her career, and those classes would help set the foundation for her company.

"I started Welch Wellness from the ground up with me, myself and I, and no real experience in starting a business," she said. "Things I thought I'd never use again have been really useful to me. Marketing, accounting and finance, and even now with social media: these are all tools I need to run my business."

Welch's formal and informal education led her to write her book a few years later too.

"My feeling was, 'Gosh, I wish I had something like that to read when my kids were little, so I could avoid a lot of things I had to go through with them,'" she said. "It's the only book of its kind that tackles the issue of feeding our kids from a three-pronged approach: how to take back control and win the behavioral battle around healthy eating, how to decipher what's happening in our country's food environment so that we can teach our children to make better choices from an early age, how to navigate the grocery store, and choose healthy food alternatives when eating out or on-the-go, etc. It's a hodge podge of information."

She insists healthy food and a healthy environment should be part of a child's upbringing from the day he or she is born.

"We're talking to our kids about bullying, drugs and alcohol, but as parents we aren't talking to our kids about the health issues associated with fast food and junk food," Welch said. "Many kids may never have issues with drugs or alcohol or bullying, but they are exposed to junk food or unhealthy food choices daily. We call this the Standard American Diet, or SAD diet: a diet full of sugary, salty and fatty, processed foods. There is nothing that we experience with our kids that we don't create, promote or allow."

Over the past few generations, Americans have disassociated food with health, according to Welch, but, in recent years, there has been more research and funding given to nutrition and holistic health, and the effects of food as medicine. Plus, there is more information available for those seeking healthy alternatives.

"There are so many incredible food activists, mommy bloggers and parents of sick children who are writing big companies insisting on change because they are fed up," she said. "If enough parents stand up, sign petitions and go to Congress, changes will be made."

Since beginning her mission to create wholesome households to mitigate health concerns in children, Welch has noticed some setbacks, but she believes that progress is being made for a healthier society.

"I see positive change every day, especially when meeting with clients, talking with concerned moms and teaching my classes. But in the end, it comes down to the children. This generation of kids is going to change the way we eat and live for good."

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