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Mothers Know Best: The 7 Most Valuable Health Lessons From Mom

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Before bloggers, Instagrammers and celebrities – the biggest influencer in your life is your mom. Read the tales from other women about the health lessons mom taught them.

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Moms: They are the original influencers. In fact, many of our healthiest habits are the ones we learned at her knee. And we're not just talking about the little things, like **brushing our teeth**, but also the big stuff, like food and **fitness** routines – habits that change the trajectory of our lives.

Of course, our mothers' sway on our health is powerful. "When we see first-hand what those who love and take care of us do, it can create a template for what we'd like to emulate," says Dr. Emily Blake, a psychologist based in Montreal. So, in honour of Mother's Day, we asked a group of women how their moms had an impact on their health values. Then we looped back with Dr. Blake to give us a sense of why it all matters.

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Health Lesson: Learned to trust alternative medicine

“My mom had us visit a chiropractor regularly. When I went away to university and stopped seeing one regularly, I realized that the treatments were a preventive measure for the **headaches** we experience in our family. My mom is always open to alternative types of medicine, including visiting a naturopath and shopping at health food stores. Now, I see a naturopath to help with my **eczema** and a massage therapist for my headaches. I learned from my mom about the balance of medicine. We work on preventive measures, with alternative medicine first. And if that doesn't help, we go to our family doctor.”

–Heather Zimmer, 40, Toronto, ON

Dr. Blake says: “When we need to know how to do something, we often reflect on earlier experiences and draw on knowledge we picked up long ago.”

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Health Lesson: Learned to love exercise

“My mom taught me to stay in great physical shape by enjoying outdoor and indoor **cardiovascular** activities. I run and Rollerblade like her, and I also **do weights** and teach spinning. I’m forever grateful to her.”

–Breanne Cater, 30, Toronto

Dr. Blake says: “Seeing moms engage in healthy behaviours can help us develop a mental network of positive associations. These positive associations can make it more likely that we’ll pursue similar behaviours because there’s the expectation that they’ll be rewarding.”

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Health Lesson: Learned how to be vegetarian

“My mom was a **vegetarian** in the late '70s and early '80s, before it was mainstream. I've been vegetarian for most of my life. I learned how to pay attention to food combinations to make sure that we're eating complete **proteins**, so I still tend to think in these terms when I'm planning meals.”

—*Alyson Bethley, 43, Guelph, ON*

Dr. Blake says: “A lived experience can teach us certain joys and, when combined with life skills, it makes us want to replicate it.”

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Health Lesson: Learned that age is only a number

“My mom would religiously go out into the woods – hunting, fishing, **hiking** the Appalachian Trail – in her 70s, 80s and early 90s with her best friend. So I don’t associate age with any decline in physical ability. I have my mom’s legacy of physical strength and prowess.”

–Dr. Christiane Northrup, Yarmouth, ME

Dr. Blake says: “When we see someone shatter stereotypes, it can give us hope that we, too, are capable of pursuing **lifestyle changes.**”

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Health Lesson: Learned how to enjoy cooking

“I moved out of my parents’ house at 19, not knowing how to cook anything. My mom had always **cooked dinner** for us and said we had to learn on our own. So I would buy premade meals that just needed to be heated up. When I moved in with my then-boyfriend (now husband) and his parents, I started trying out **new recipes** with my mother-in-law, who would always sit at her computer

desk in the kitchen and help me cook. Being confident while cooking for my family is the biggest gift anyone could have given me.”

–Dale Chymko, 30, Toronto

Dr. Blake says: “Sometimes our experiences can resonate at a profound level and give voice to what was previously only a whisper.”

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Health Lesson: Learned to be confident

“My father’s mother took ‘no guff’ and acted without hesitation in pretty much anything she did. I spent a lot of time with her and learned that, if she was going to do something, she was going to do it right. She had the confidence to know she was capable. I grew up almost completely unaware that I wouldn’t be able to do some things. I might not have known how to do it at the start, but I was capable of learning it if I put in the effort. This sense of **confidence** is huge in my life, especially now in my career. I am never afraid to say ‘yes’ to projects and challenges.”

–*Jules Cormier, 31, Toronto*

Dr. Blake says: “Letting children know that you believe in them can help them foster a sense of confidence in their own abilities. When you act on the belief that you’re capable, it tends to propel your life forward.”

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Health Lesson: Learned to be a foodie

“Cooking was not a priority for my mom growing up. She sees food as fuel – necessary to keep the body going – not something to take pleasure in preparing and **eating**. She relied on convenience foods, just like many other ’70s moms did, because they were quick, easy and filling. When I was nine or 10, we had brunch at our local golf club. My dad added a few slices of **kiwi** fruit to my plate and, from that moment, I was fascinated by food.

“At 16, just after I got my driver’s license, I drove to the grocery store for ingredients to cook a surprise dinner for my parents’ anniversary. Using my mom’s barely cracked cookbooks, I pulled the meal off: Chicken supreme in peppercorn sauce with parsley potatoes, sautéed matchstick carrots and **zucchini**. From that point, I began cooking for myself at home. Now I love **growing my own vegetables**, supporting local farmers and cooking most meals from scratch.”

–Leslie McNab, 50, Niagara Falls, ON

Dr. Blake says: “If people associate negative emotions with a particular experience in their youth, it can become something they want to pull away from later on.”

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