

# HOW MY FAMILY STARTED EATING BETTER

**WHO**  
Cindy Craig, 42

**HOMETOWN**  
Kansas City,  
Missouri

**WHAT I  
LEARNED**  
It's easier to make  
a big change when  
everyone is on  
board. We don't  
just have healthier  
bodies; we are  
closer as a family.

My husband Marc and I have three boys in three different schools. With work, sports, church and friends in the mix, we sometimes feel like we're going in a hundred million directions. It's no wonder that at mealtime, convenience is the main ingredient.

For as long as I can remember, we were on a regular dinner rotation of pre-made processed foods like Hamburger Helper, frozen pizza, fish sticks and mac and cheese. Peas, potatoes and corn were about the only vegetables my boys would eat, and on soccer nights, dinner came through a fast-food drive-up window. I knew we could be eating better, but I didn't think the kids would be open to trying new foods and I wasn't even really sure where to start.

Then in 2008, my oldest son's school, Kansas City Academy, started a Farm to Cafeteria program. Now Coby Bryars, a chef from Bistro Kids, makes lunch from as many organic or locally grown foods as possible. Farmers visit for show-and-tell, and students grow food and take cooking classes. It's a very cool way to help kids be

connected to where their food comes from.

One day, Daniel came home raving about something new he'd tried at school. (He couldn't remember the name of it, but we eventually figured out it was tabouleh.) I saw my opportunity to start making changes – when Daniel is interested in something, his younger brothers, Andrew and Matthew, usually want to be in on it too.

I went to a local farmers expo and learned about Community Supported Agriculture. In a CSA program, members pay up front to provide income to farmers, then get locally grown food throughout the season. There were so many different kinds of programs offering meat, eggs, honey and fruits and vegetables, that I had trouble choosing one! I took fliers home to my family and we agreed on one that was affordable, provided the right amount of food and could be picked up while we were out doing the usual weekend errands and activities.

When the season started, we were excited to see what our weekly CSA shares

## ABOUT COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE

Community Supported Agriculture is a great way to be more in touch with where your food comes from. You're doing something good for your community, for local farmers and for your body. To find CSA programs in Kansas City, go to [www.kc-csac.org](http://www.kc-csac.org).

CINDY CRAIG OF BROOKSIDE HELPED HER FAMILY SLOW DOWN AND MAKE BETTER CHOICES. NOW FAST FOOD IS A THING OF THE PAST AND EVERYONE WORKS TOGETHER TO PUT HEALTHY HOMEMADE FOOD ON THE TABLE.

*As told to Heather Winslow Gibbons  
Photos by Denise Williams*



For the Craig family – Marc, Cindy, Daniel, 15, Andrew, 12, and Matthew, 7, – a surprise bonus of eating better was having more time to spend together.

held. Often, it was vegetables we'd never had in our house. To figure out what to do with all these new foods, I talked to friends, cracked open cookbooks and researched recipes. Some dishes were successful, some weren't, but I specifically remember my disbelief when I served butternut squash with black olives and feta cheese and the boys wanted seconds!

What I don't remember is making a conscious decision not to eat fast food. We simply got out of the habit because the CSA food needed to be eaten. (If we ever eat fast food now, it doesn't taste good, and even the boys can't believe we used to eat it on a regular basis!)

It was Daniel who started us on this

path, and he's probably the one most changed by it. He goes to weekly cooking classes and has formed a friendship with Chef Coby. Daniel has learned to make bread, and often takes some to share with Chef Coby and his classmates. He also feels better because this new healthy diet makes him less susceptible to mood swings brought on by his ADD. I think he's more even tempered and more focused when he eats good meals.

The change also has been good for the whole family. We've managed to spend more time together and keep up with our other commitments (though we don't watch as much television as we used to, which is probably a good thing!).



Each week the Craigs receive a bounty of vegetables from Fair Share Farm near Kearney, Mo.

## make time for healthy eating

### 1 grow something

We tried gardening in the past, but now that the boys are involved, it's a fun family activity. We all have a better appreciation for just how much work goes into getting food on the table. Also, the boys are more likely to try something when they've helped it grow from a seed into food they can eat. I think our family is closer, too, because working side by side creates a cooperative spirit and makes it easier to talk.

### 2 make your own fast food

We are in the habit of freezing some of our CSA vegetables so we'll have locally grown food even in the dead of winter. When the boys have friends over, we make our own pizzas – sometimes even the dough – from scratch.

Tacos are another easy dinner each person can customize. Everyone helps chop our favorite ingredients: cooked chicken, lettuce, tomatoes, shredded cheese, black olives and salsa. When we have time to actually *cook*, we double the recipe and put half in the freezer. Inevitably, the frozen version tastes better!

### 3 involve the whole family

This new approach to eating has become a normal part of how our family functions. Each boy gets to plan a dinner menu once a week. They make their own snacks to take in the car, and they have a say in what we'll

grow in the garden or how we'll use our CSA food. Not only are they learning to make good choices, they are learning valuable life skills, too.

### 4 start slowly

I knew it would be impossible to make over our food habits all at once. When you ban foods or force foods, no one wins. Our process was a series of small changes that eventually led to an entirely new way of eating.

### 5 redefine dinnertime

Since I work late, the guys eat dinner together. When I get home and sit down to eat, everyone comes back to the table to talk about their day and make plans for tomorrow. Sometimes we play a question game some friends gave us a few years ago. It's fun to find out what rule the boys would break if they could, or what is their favorite spot in the house.

### 6 keep trying

I've read it can take 8-15 tries for a kid to like a new food, so I don't take it personally if my boys reject something the first time. We'll try it again a different way, and if dinner is ever a complete disaster, we don't make it a fight, we make peanut butter and jelly instead.

### 7 be the change

I have to admit there are times, especially when I'm stressed out or feeling particularly rushed, that I'm tempted to hit the drive through. In those "fast food moments," I start to feel uneasy. That's when I check myself and say, "This goes against what I'm trying to teach my family" or "This isn't the example I want to set for my kids." I know I can't expect them to change their habits if I don't change mine. 📌



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PHOTOGRAPHY

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