

SPECIAL REPORT

Our Stress Swat Team to the Rescue

For *Ladies' Home Journal's* stressed-out family, the MacKenzies, the road to relaxation can't be traveled in one day. But after spending just a few hours with three members of our Stress Swat Team—nutritionist **Oz Garcia**, yoga instructor Kacy Duke and meditation expert Beryl Bender Birch—the family of eight just outside of Poughkeepsie, New York, was considerably calmer. As they implement the swat team's suggestions over the months ahead, we'll track their blood pressure, cortisol levels and self-reported stress levels. (Read about their progress as reported by mom Robin MacKenzie at www.lhj.com/robinjournal.)

Better Breakfasts:

The family's supply of soda and snacks was out of sight in the basement refrigerator during **Garcia's** visit—but a giant jar of marshmallow creme the kids use with peanut butter to make "fluffer nutter" sandwiches was in plain sight. The sugary treat caught

Garcia's eye, but he was more concerned with the family's breakfast habits. Pressed for time, Robin usually grabs a Frappuccino, while Katlyn, 15, 'fessed up to a brownie the day before. Sugary breakfast cereal is not uncommon for the rest.

Caffeine and sugar create energy highs and lows that can exacerbate stress, said **Garcia**. He suggested a diet with limited sugar and caffeine, and plenty of fresh produce, whole grains, and lean protein. But **Garcia** said it would be unrealistic for them to go from sugary cereals and chips to a perfect diet overnight. Instead he suggested they look at what they already enjoy eating, and squeeze in a little more nutritional value through substitution. Go for whole-grain pasta over white, add fish as a lean protein and cut back on products with added sugar. "I'll even let you keep the Fluff," **Garcia** said, as long as they use whole-grain bread and peanut butter without extra sugar.

Small Steps: The kids have after-school sports activities, but Robin



Nutritionist **Oz Garcia** gave Robin and Leigh MacKenzie a recipe for stress-free eating; 3-year-old Keavy enjoyed a healthy snack

gave up her kickboxing class last year, and Leigh stopped cycling, his exercise of choice, after their youngest child was born.

Duke, a trainer for Equinox fitness clubs, had one simple goal for them: Start doing *something*. "Even if it's just five minutes a day, your body will start to crave it, and then you'll do 15 minutes a day, eventually 30." The first step was to remove the pile of clothes on the elliptical trainer in the bedroom. She suggested Robin and Leigh spend 10 minutes a day on the unearthed machine, then add in a modest routine of sit-ups (three sets of eight), push-ups (five for her, 10 for him), and biceps and triceps curls—20 minutes total.

Just Breathe: To help the family relax, Birch taught them a simple meditation technique called "ujjayi breathing." Robin, Leigh, Katlyn, 15, Christopher, 13, and Conall, 8, sat cross-legged on the living

room floor to learn the technique. "Pretend you're fogging a mirror with your breath," Birch said. "For ujjayi breathing, do the same with your mouth closed." (It should sound like a quiet Darth Vader.) Birch suggested the MacKenzies try this breathing technique anywhere—in the car, at school, work, anytime things get hectic. Accompanying the sound of five "Darth Vader" breaths was the soundtrack of Saturday: shouts, squeals, squeaks, slams, "ow, ow, ow!" dogs whimpering, toilets flushing, shrieks, laughter, thumps. When Robin finally opened her eyes, she looked refreshed. But the first words after her meditation? "I can't believe the kids made that much noise!"

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Time into ABC's 20/20 for a special report on the MacKenzies. Check your local listings for details.

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