

RAISING HEALTHY AUSSIES IN 2024: THE NEXT GENERATION

New research reveals Aussie parents' struggles to raise healthy kids.

Sydney, MAY 2024 - Nurturing healthy habits in children is a top priority for Aussie parents, but it's not without its challenges. Fresh research shines a light on the struggles faced by parents in raising healthy, well-rounded kids in today's fast-paced world. With nearly 9 in 10 Aussie youngsters (85%) diving into extracurricular activities, it's clear that parents are committed to fostering their children's interests and talents.

However, this commitment comes at a cost, with parents spending an average of 579 hours and \$3,255 each year supporting their kids' sporting or other extracurricular activities, up 49 per cent from \$2,180 since 2017.

Commissioned by Real Insurance, in partnership with consumer research group MyMavins, [The Real Healthy Kids Report 2024](#) surveyed 3,026 Australian parents with children under 18 years living at home. The report explores the motivations, costs, and concerns surrounding the upbringing of active children, highlighting the various factors that influence parenting decisions. The study also compares trends, challenges, and expenses with the [Real Australian Active Kids Report 2017](#) to identify how the landscape of parenting has evolved.

The cost of healthy kids

While Aussies continue to face rising living costs, the research found most parents (77%) are feeling the financial strain of providing healthy food for their families. To help manage expense a quarter of parents (25%) are limiting the number of sports their children play, while others encourage their kids to participate in free or low-cost programs (17%). However, a further 82% are struggling with the cost of sport and extracurricular activities.

When it comes to maintaining a nutritious diet, parents are spending an average of \$8,294 annually (over \$22 a day or \$159 each week), with those having one dependent child spending \$8,073 and those with three or more dependents spending \$9,237.

And even if you do spend the money, there's still a chance you'll be lunchbox shamed, with more than 2 in 5 (42%) claiming to have witnessed or experienced this. Teachers, care providers, or other parents are to blame, with these Aussie parents most commonly citing criticisms about food quantity (34%), "weird" food (34%), and unhealthy choices (30%).

The costs don't end there. The average parent is also spending \$829 annually on their kid's health appointments, with parents whose children participate in sports several times per week reportedly spending \$947 a year.

To help manage rising costs, most parents with kids involved in sport or extracurricular activities (88%) resort to various budgeting techniques. Some strategies include allocating a specific amount of money each month (29%) and prioritising these expenses over discretionary spending (24%).

The role of a parent

It's impossible to ignore the vital role parents play in encouraging and enabling their kids to lead a healthy life – and most parents with sporty kids (60%) are happy to be involved and support them. Half of Aussie parents with kids involved in extracurricular activities (50%) admitted to making the decision for them to get involved or strongly encouraged certain activities. However, it's not all driven by the parents, with a quarter (25%) involving their children in the decision-making process or encouraging them to make their own choices (23%). Only 3 per cent of parents leave it entirely to their children to decide.

In good news, there has been a significant shift in parental involvement post-pandemic, with 72% of parents actively taking their children outdoors, compared to just over half (55%) in 2017.

The time and fiscal investment have their benefits, with 2 in 3 (68%) parents of kids who play sports believing the physical activity has improved their children's academic performance. Interestingly, women (64%) need more convincing than men (73%) on the matter.

However, it's not without judgement. Despite the positive impact, the study also uncovered social pressures and shaming, with boasting (32%), gossiping (28%), and passive-aggressive behaviour (21%) being common, emphasising the need for a supportive and inclusive environment for children and parents alike.

Clinical Psychologist working with children and teens and Director, Developing Minds, Kirrilie Smout commented: "It can be helpful for parents to keep talking with kids about their experiences in their extracurricular activities. Ask them about what they enjoyed, what they didn't enjoy and what they wish was different. Parents don't have to "rescue" kids from challenging experiences, but it is useful to role play or coach them through how they manage social pressures."

The balancing act

Finding a balance between supporting children's well-being and other commitments proves challenging for nearly 9 in 10 parents (86%), who juggle the demands of work, family, and personal time.

Furthermore, 3 in 5 (60%) find it challenging to meet the expectations set by schools, while around 2 in 3 (64%) struggle to keep pace with the efforts of other parents.

Parents whose kids play sports face other challenges including the significant cost (42%), constant rushing (34%), difficulty in finding time (34%) and feelings of guilt for not doing more (30%). Just under a quarter (24%) of parents admitted they struggle to connect with other parents.

Kirrilie Smout commented: "It is not uncommon for Australian parents and caregivers to experience high levels of parent stress and distress - and even parental burnout. The reality is that day to day caring for young people can be extremely demanding for many parents - especially those with children with higher needs. There are no easy answers, but parents should try to keep prioritising their own sleep, time to relax, exercise and nutrition needs, even at the expense of their children at times.

“It can also be important to make a note of the beliefs and thoughts we have as parents which make us feel stressed at times - seeing these in writing can help us notice if they are unrealistic - help us talk to ourselves in more realistic and kind ways. It’s also important - even though it is hard - to reach out to other parents to say hi or share the load. Even sending a text or email to other school parents to keep up some connection can help over the long term.”

Smoke and mirrors

Beyond fears of injury, school performance, and mental health, parents have a new concern in 2024 – vaping. In fact, a quarter (25%) of parents either suspect their child is vaping or has caught them vaping.

Around 1 in 6 (16%) parents in NSW reported that their child is vaping somewhat regularly, followed by just under 1 in 7 (13%) in Victoria.

There’s certainly a lot involved in keeping kids healthy in 2024, but by supporting their physical, mental, and emotional health, parents and caregivers play a crucial role in shaping a healthier and happier future generation.

Further insights from the research can be found on the Real Insurance website [here](#).

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