

"No one is left behind...The world needs this book right now!"

Dr. Phyllis Books

# FAMILY HEALTH REVOLUTION

The Definitive Guide to Elevating Your Family's Health



Use Lifestyle Medicine to Overcome Disease, Illness, and Discomfort,  
Demedicalize Family Health, Slow Down Fast-Paced Modern Family Life,  
Reduce Stress, and Return Your Family to the Ease of Wellness, Naturally.

CARLA ATHERTON

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### DEDICATION

*Of course, this book is for my children: Nicholas, Olivia, and Isabel; for Brent, for my mom and dad, sisters, brothers, extended family and friends. Of course. This book is also for this earth we call home and for all the creatures on it. This book is for you, the reader, and all the moms and dads out there making a better world for your children.*

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## INTRODUCTION

### The Sky *Is* Falling

When I think about the children's story, "Chicken Little," I imagine this small, intense, reactionary chicken running around exclaiming to everyone that the "sky is falling!" His concern, no, his *sheer panic*, is met with everything from rolling eyes to indifference. He is ignored and sometimes even ridiculed as he desperately tries to get the masses to look up, to see the imminent danger, to believe what he says so that his community can save itself. Is Chicken Little making a big deal out of nothing, or does he see what the rest of us do not? Is this what many progressive healthcare professionals, parents, and functional and lifestyle medicine professionals are sounding the alarm about when they report that the health of our human population is on the rapid decline, and all because of the choices we are making and the dangers we are ignoring?

These are big questions that are difficult to face, especially when it comes to the health of our loved-ones. But this is why you brave people are reading this. You want to know what's wrong and how we can fix it.

ADHD, Alzheimer's, autism, obesity, autoimmunity, diabetes, heart disease, stroke, fatigue, learning disabilities, mood disorders, eczema, allergy, asthma, and general malaise are just *some* of the conditions, diseases, and illnesses people are succumbing to in epidemic numbers. Even when their symptoms are undiagnosable or not defined according to any particular disease, people are coming to their healthcare professionals feeling not quite right, dragging, tired, never really well. At the time of writing this book, it was reported that 10% of children in the US have ADD/ADHD and 17% are labelled as "learning disabled." Most schools are peanut-free zones due to the staggering number of children who have anaphylactic reactions to peanuts. Autism rates have climbed from 1 in 150 in the year 2000 to 1 in 40 in 2020. If this trend continues, more than 50% of our children born in the year 2032 will have autism! The questions we are all asking are: Why? What is happening? And what can we do about it: for ourselves, for our children, and for our future generations?

Call me Chicken Little, but isn't it apparent that the sky *is* falling?

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When a writer, artist, activist, mother or father, mover or shaker embarks on a mission to help either themselves, their own families, or the greater world community, most of them say the time and effort will have been worth it if they reach even one person. I don't feel that way. I am not writing *Family Health Revolution* to only reach you. I *want* to reach you, yes, and yes; I am honored that you have picked up this book and are spending this time with me. But I also want to reach your children, your extended families, your spouse and community. I want to reach my own family, my own children, and my own community. Maybe I'm codependent when it comes to health; I don't care. I have come to accept that I am *not* OK if the people I love are not OK. And I am pretty sure you're not, either.

At my latest yoga teacher training, my teacher asked me what would happen if my children were all in a car together and died in a crash. I told her truthfully that not much would matter anymore. She challenged me on that through philosophical talk and reasoned that whatever we do, it needs to be for ourselves; not in a selfish way, but in a way that is intrinsically motivating and not hinging on any particular outcome or on anyone else that may be here one day and gone the next.

I wanted to say, "I know what you are trying to do here and get it, but I don't care. My children are my hearts walking around outside of me."

The fact is, I may not be very evolved.

Although non-attachment and letting go of outcomes has been a practice of mine to ensure the retention of my sanity, I am pretty darn attached to my children and the outcome of good health for them; the outcome of a good chance at a relatively healthy life.

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In another exercise, we were paired up and were to look our partners in the eyes and non-verbally download our stories and words of wisdom to the other. Without words, I told my partner that letting go of our children is just not possible and that even though we need to be motivated by our individual passions, values, creativity—and, yes, we need our own lives—it is OK if they are part of who we are and if our happiness is connected to theirs because isn't that the nature of love? Isn't that why it hurts to love sometimes? Isn't this why we fight so fiercely for certain things in life; for our survival and for that of our families, friends, and communities? My partner in this exercise cried as I "told" her this. And I don't know if her tears were because of the intensity of the exercise or because she could feel everything I was telling her. But she cried. And I didn't because I was feeling fierce and determined and purposeful. This was a very important message. Maybe the most important one I had to share with her.

And this is my message to you.

We know there is more to family health than the new normal of sub-optimal health we are now experiencing. Mothers, fathers, grandparents, and caregivers strive for more for our families. I hope these words inform, inspire, and empower you so you can make. that. shift. happen. To recovery. To ease. To vitality.

I am a mother, writer, and researcher who didn't stop until I found the answers. My motivation? Some of the fallen were my own children, my own grandmother, my own friends. And many others who narrowly escaped death and many more who are still struggling. I asked why and dug deep into the science to find the causes so I could uncover the solutions; I discovered that health isn't found at the bottom of a pill bottle or in a one-shot remedy, and that there were other people who could teach me what healthcare really should be. On those days when doubt crept in, I asked myself: Carla, is it really that bad? Can't you just go on living the way you have always lived? Can't we just keep doing what we are doing and have that be good enough?

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You may ask me those very questions, as well. Was there ever a time in history that humans have been truly healthy? Are we any worse off than we were before? The answer may not be “yes” in some ways, but it most certainly is in others. We once suffered from plagues and died earlier in life from common everyday illnesses like influenza. A diagnosis of Type 1 Diabetes was a death sentence, and infections could run rampant causing death in a very short period of time. Yet, in many places in the world, chronic illness was unheard of, and happiness was found in community and healthy living rather than in therapy sessions and medications.

I ask: what are the biggest problems we are facing *right now*? How many of those problems exist due to “the nature of things,” and how many are caused by the decisions we are making? Instead of answering those questions of myself, I ask those questions of you. I encourage you to look around and note what you see. Even if you don’t have the stats and numbers and studies in your back pocket to validate your own concerns and observations, note what *you* are seeing in *your own* family, *your own* community, *your own* backyard? Have a look in your schools and workplaces; in malls and hospitals and other public spaces. What do you see? And are you ok with it? We don’t need scientific studies to tell us that chronic illness, obesity, cancers, mood problems, and dementia are rapidly replacing generally good mental, emotional, and physical health. Although the evidence is undeniable and will be deeply explored in the upcoming pages of this book, we actually don’t need studies and research to assert that fewer of us are living as robust, vital, engaged, purposeful people well into old age.

What we *do* have right at our fingertips is very exciting, however. If we understand holistic health, that healthy lifestyle choices are exceedingly powerful, and if we couple healthy lifestyle choices with modern acute care interventions that we can use *when necessary* (like when we have an injury or emergency situation), we have the opportunity to have it all. We can have the best of both worlds if we know what it means to be healthy and are aware of how we can attain that good health from the bottom up, from the inside out and the outside in. We can return to the nature of “human nature” and reconnect with our bodies, spirits, and the natural world around us.

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Good health is multifaceted—simple but not easy—and takes nothing less than a health revolution to attain, due to our reckless, modern culture. Because we believe that faster is better and cash is king, we are taking great liberties at the expense of our own health and the health of our children and elders. We need to make a change for the future of our very species. Now, I, for one, am ready to be healthy and happy. I, for one, want my children to suffer less and enjoy life more. I am ready for a change *for the better*. I am ready to redefine, yet, again, our new normal.

How about you? Are you with me? I appeal to you, fellow parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles. Are you ready to shift your sights?

Let's look up and catch the sky.

### OUR STORY

When we are moved to create something extraordinary, something that comes fully from who we are, from what gets us out of bed in the morning, from a clear and relentless vision, it often comes out of a place of necessity, a place of pain, from an experience or an event that narrowed our sites on a purpose.

My daughter was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes in February 2012. I am reluctant to talk about this event as if it is the only defining moment in my life, and I certainly do not want to make my glorious, fierce daughter into a diabetes poster child. But the fact is, that turn of events changed the life course of everyone in our family. The ripple went wide.

Gone were the carefree days of eating whatever we wanted at potlucks and picnics, going out for ice cream, sleeping well and deeply at night, taking for granted that everyone would wake up in the morning relatively happy. Here came the days of tests and finger pricks and needles, of frustrating doctor's visits, of fear that was so stealthy, so quietly present, that it would coolly walk into my mind like a ghost long after I thought it was gone.

On that first day, her father cried in the hospital kitchen asking me: "Why couldn't it have been me?" as if it worked like that; as if it was his fault, as if he could take it from her.

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My daughter stated to me from her hospital bed: “I am going to have this for the rest of my life,” like she just knew; like some kind of wisdom came over her, and she understood what it all meant.

Me? I got busy, as I always do. I took charge and arrived at the hospital the next day with a pot of homemade soup determined to make her well.

But both my daughter and her father saw something I did not. They saw what I knew we could not focus on at the time or we would not get through. The very long road we had ahead.

My babe struggled. In the teen years, chronic illness is a tough row to hoe. And even with what I know about health and diabetes, in particular, I could not always reach her or help her as much as I would have liked. In all honesty, sometimes I felt I couldn't reach her at all; that all of the untruths we are taught about powerlessness and medicalized health and non-medical healing methods and nutrition and other lifestyle interventions, were stronger than what her own mother and most fierce advocate was trying to teach her. It became difficult to discern whether her struggles were due to “normal” teenage angst or the roller coaster of highs and lows in both blood sugars and hormones. Teenhood is tough enough as it is, but add to it a chronic illness that invades your privacy and exposes every flaw and mistake, and you have one hell of a challenge. Diabetes made her, at times, prickly, alone, and angry. Everything would break apart with the slightest crunch of the eggshells I walked on. She was not able to be as free as a teenage girl wants to be, and in so many ways, this embodied existence was a prison.

All of you mamas out there know that once your children are born, the umbilical cord is never really severed. We feel our children's joy, but we also feel their pain. I once wrote in a poem that my children are “my hearts walking outside of me.” I even wrote that line in the previous section of this very book. They are out in the world raw and vulnerable. They make *us* vulnerable to every heartbreak or challenge they encounter. And we want so desperately to fix them or patch them up.

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So, I did another thing I do in situations I want to change; I spent countless hours adding certification after certification to my list of credentials, researching everything from blog posts by other parents, to academic articles and research studies, to materials from the schools I attended. I went to conferences both online and in person. I even began to host them, myself, and to speak for dozens more. I called doctors and practitioners and met the best face-to-face. I learned from podcasts, lessons, and trainings, both scholarly and the stuff aired for everyday people. I dug deep into what might have caused one of my own to fall and how to get her back up again.

And you know what? I didn't reach that sunny place right away. In fact, I kept chasing the horizon, and the sun kept setting. I felt alone. I felt overwhelmed. I felt like I could never learn or know enough. I felt that every moment that passed was another nail in my daughter's coffin.

I *had* to figure it out. What was the cause, and what could we do about it? I knew that what I grew up believing was not true and that a diagnosis was not the end, but the beginning. And still, it got worse before it got better. My other two children had their own health struggles: one with depression and autoimmunity, and the other with severe anemia and GI trouble. And their father and I were falling apart, as well.

So, there I was, trying to make a fledgling business take flight, working so much that the lines between my work and life were practically non-existent, researching on top of that a minimum of four hours a day, lecturing and running programs, homeschooling, getting three kids off to sports seven times a week, studying and meeting deadlines, trying to stretch the little money we had to also pay for testing and supplements that I was not sure were right or working, and navigating the healthcare system with forms and healthcare visits that left me frustrated, angry, disempowered, and hopeless that anyone at all could or would help us. I had to spend my limited, precious energy explaining our diet and how we spent our money to relatives who could not understand. I was spinning my wheels and was spent—emotionally and financially.

One day, I was speaking with Brenda, our insurance broker, trying to figure out some details about our house insurance when the topic of health came about. For some serendipitous reason, I mentioned that we had been navigating health issues with one of our children. She asked me if our daughter's condition was terminal. Just like that.

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I was a little surprised by the question, but told her that, no, it was not terminal, that it was chronic. We'd had a lot of success, but new challenges were cropping up as we moved through life and the changes that come with it. It turned out that Brenda also has Type 1. This connected us, for sure, but what she said next penetrated deep into my heart.

The reason she asked me about the status of our daughter's condition was that, years ago, she lost her young son to leukemia. I was amazed by her strength when she spoke so calmly and clearly about how he fought so hard for 6 years to live, while I cried on the other end of the phone. My mama heart went out to hers. The next story she told me was about her nephew who, like my daughter, had Type 1 but committed suicide at the age of 18. My own son was 18 at the time. What could that possibly be like?

Honestly, my friends, I often say that I do not know how people get through losing a child or the struggles they face every day when one of them is sick or hurting in any way. But I *do* know. I know the way we get through is to support each other by listening as well as sharing our own stories. By sharing what we have learned so we can help our fallen get back up, whether that be our children, our grandparents, our parents, our friends, or us.

Brenda said she regretted one thing: that she did not know then what she knows now. Isn't that always how it goes? If only I had known. I would think this thought at times when I wracked my brain wondering what happened to our once-carefree daughter who was not damaged but has had to grow up perhaps a little too soon. I think that thought a lot less now. It flits by in my mind like a caged bird, and I let it go. I choose to focus on what we *can* do *now*. I choose to focus on what we have. And with that, we move on.

Parents and caregivers, you can't prevent everything. You can't know everything, and you do the very best with what you *can* prevent and know at the time. Although we parents need to be the head of our families and guide our children using our experience and what we have learned, a large part of parenting is letting go and surrendering. We must not beat ourselves up about the things we did not know or cannot control.

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But what *we can* do is build and act on what we *do* know and to share that knowledge with other parents. We can decide not to settle for less. We can become empowered and empower our children and broader communities.

Empowerment is being able to access more support and information to make this thing we call health a little easier to navigate. No one comes to a space of health and happiness by doing nothing. Weight does not melt away without a change in diet or lifestyle. Good thoughts do not fall from the sky. You cannot close your eyes and hope the pimples, the depression, the addiction, the asthma, the allergies, the chronic illness—will just go away. Healthy habits do not form without action. There is no prevention without understanding the cause.

Although we need to be gentle with ourselves, this gentle approach needs to be balanced with a good kick in the rear to grab the controls and fly the plane.

I couldn't help but cry when I listened to Brenda tell me about her two fallen children. Their stories have been ringing through my mind since and will continue to do so forever. Their stories—and those of my own children and the other families I work with every day—solidify my mission, inform me as to what I need to do, and inspire me to create more ways to join forces with families who feel lost and hopeless and afraid or who just simply want some good, quality family health information. They are why I wrote this book.

So, how did I regain control? Or more accurately—how do I continually lose control but regain it again and again?

I read every book I can get my hands on, but I also reach out to people. Lots of people. I get educated by adding certifications and coursework to my degrees. Like an inquisitive, relentless four-year-old, I ask so many questions to Naturopaths doctors and practitioners, to Facebook groups and forums, and of my ever-growing list of contacts and colleagues, that I am sure I annoy a lot of people. And if they are annoyed or can't help, I ask someone else.

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In the beginning, I started out asking for the advice and the thoughts of the brilliant people I learned I could trust. Then as I learned more and wanted to do more, I ran with it creating projects, initiatives, and collaborative efforts *with those people* to drastically improve the situations of families who were struggling not only with health issues, but with all of the fallout that comes with them: Burn-out. Loneliness. Fear. Powerlessness.

I created the Lotus Health Project, the Children's Health Summits, and the Healthy Family Formula knowing that they would grow up to be a health revolution. I was also one of those people who was still trying to figure it all out for myself at the same time as being a support to others. And instead of feeling like an impostor, I realized that this was the best place to be if I was to make some real change. Community is not a hierarchy where one person is always at the top and the rest are the lowly know-nothings. It is like the body—it is a system of moving parts, each one contributing, each one with a job to do, a strength, a purpose; each one essential for the health of the others. Community is about mutual support where we are all teachers sharing our own individual expertise and information. A community is a space to both receive and to give; an exchange, a co-creation. So, yes, there are teachers, but those teachers also learn from their students. We are all both students *and* teachers.

Once I started to put myself and my work out into the world, I began to hear back from parents, grandparents, teachers, and others. Now, every day I encounter families just like ours. Families who want answers. Families who are ready to blow the lid off of this thing we call health.

When I send out information by way of my newsletters and other writings, I forever hope that my words resonate; that the people who read my work feel less alone. I often receive feedback confirming they do. But what I also receive in return is a tidal wave of support for *me*. These parents and caregivers tell *me* that *I* am not alone! So, they get stronger, and I get stronger, and as the saying goes, “a rising tide lifts all boats.”

The response I receive demonstrates exactly how we parents can navigate our way through our trials and tribulations: through the support of each other. To you, I say, “thank you.” And with the strength I continue to gather from your candor, your support, your gifts of hope, I continue to create and uncover more resources for us all. For parents like you, and for mamas like Brenda.

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I am honoured and proud of what we continue to co-create in response to all of this, what we have co-created for families like ours—a way to health that will be a game-changer, for both ourselves and for our children.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Carla Atherton is the Director of the Healthy Family Formula and the HFF Family Health Coach Training Academy, Host of the Children's Health Summit, proud mother of three, and family Health advocate. Carla is on a revolutionary mission to empower families to transcend our new normal of ill health and chronic disease. Find her on her acreage writing, researching, and teaching or online at [www.healthyfamilyformula.com](http://www.healthyfamilyformula.com).

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