

30 hacks to simplify family life with kids and pets





As your family grows, the juggle continues with work, kids, exercise, pets, friends and more, all competing for your time. And this can leave most of us wishing we could work less and spend more time with our kids as they grow up.

So with that in mind, wouldn't it be nice if family life was simpler? It would mean less stress, more time spent with the kids, and the freedom to enjoy more of the better things in life.

Well, we're here to help you do just that! From ticking off chores to keeping fit and training pets, here are **30 top hacks** for adding more family, health and happiness to your days.



Family life

Tip 1: Make systems work for you

Having written systems for doing the washing, making shopping lists, sorting school notes and dealing with other 'house admin' tasks may seem like overkill, but in a busy home it just makes sense. With a set system, everyone knows what to do and can chip in. Note down the system in your family diary or stick it on the fridge so everyone can follow it. Also, you don't have to waste time thinking about what you should do – you just do it.

Tip 2: Save time with online shopping

Walking the grocery aisles during peak hour with a tired and hungry eight-year-old may be the very definition of torture. Don't put yourself through it. Save time (and your sanity) by sometimes doing your grocery shopping online. Sign up for weekly catalogue emails so you know what's on special, and write your grocery lists from there.

Over half of parents who returned to work after having children said achieving a balance between work and family life was one of the things they found most difficult at this time.

Tip 3: Cook together

When you cook together as a family, you're creating something tangible – you just need to decide whether it'll be dinner or dessert. Cooking also gives you the chance to teach the kids a variety of skills, create long-lasting memories and save money with homemade food. The kids are also more likely to eat the food they've made – so it's a win-win!

Tip 4: Make a night of it

Don't let family time slip through your fingers. Instead, make one night every week a designated 'family night'. Cut up some small pieces of paper and get everyone to write down their favourite family activities – whether it's playing board games, eating at a restaurant, enjoying a movie together or taking a bike ride. Each week, draw one piece of paper from a hat and enjoy that activity together on family night.

Tip 7: Join the decluttering trend

Decluttering is popular for a reason: it offers a double win. First, by getting rid of unwanted items there are simply less things to organise and clean. Second, those things haven't just been taking up space in your house – they've also been cluttering your mind. You'll now feel like you have that little extra room to think more clearly.

Tip 8: Make chores a family affair

Spray-and-wipe time may be the most mundane part of your day, but for kids this activity can actually border on fun. Turn it into a game or create a reward system for extra incentive. Give clear instructions on what you need help with and then check on your worker bees every now and again. You don't want them to start having too much fun by spray and wiping the dog or their sibling.



Tip 5: Discover easy dinner ideas

Feeding your family may be your number one priority, but putting dinner on the table night after night isn't always easy. Create a folder of easy dinner ideas so you can whip something up in minutes when you're too mentally exhausted to even think about cooking.

Tip 6: Step back and prioritise

Sometimes there's simply not enough time to do everything on our wish list. Instead of sighing about it, look at the big picture. What really needs doing? What things won't make such a huge difference? Get rid of the things on your to-do list that don't need to be there and prioritise the rest.

Tip 9: Set a timer

Do you often spend more time thinking about doing a task than actually doing it? Stop taking up valuable time thinking about doing something. Set a 10-minute timer and just do it. It's amazing how much you can do in 10 or 20 minutes if you're on a deadline.

Tip 10: Buy a family diary/calendar

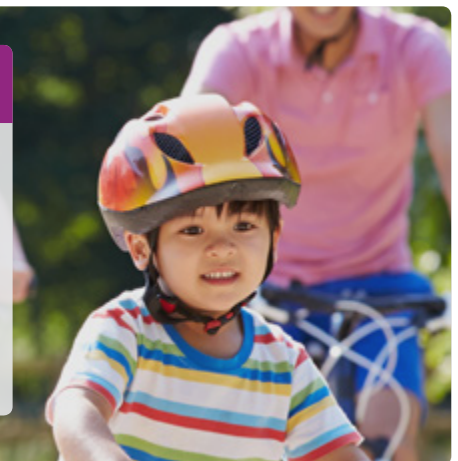
A family diary/calendar lets you record obligations and events for everyone in the family. When you can see at a glance what's coming up, it's a lot easier to get everything under control and make the right plans.



Staying healthy

Keeping up with our active kids!

- ✔ 85% of Aussie kids are involved in weekly sporting activities.
- ✔ On average, parents with kids involved in sport spend 848 hours annually on those activities.
- ✔ 88% of parents are happy to make the commitment to their kids' sport, and 92% say it's fun being involved.



Tip 11: Make exercise family time

It's hard to fit in everything, and between working and raising children only one in three people say they also manage to exercise. Why not become more time-efficient by combining family time with exercise? Walking, rope-skipping, bike-riding, gardening, backyard cricket and swimming are all fun activities that the whole family can enjoy.

Tip 12: Be positive

Intentionally changing your thoughts to emphasise the positive things in your world can have big benefits. Coax out that inner optimist and you'll not only feel happier, but could [live longer](#), [feel more energised](#), [stress less](#) and [achieve more](#).

Tip 13: Incorporate tech with exercise

Can't get to a class? Grab your phone or other device and stream a workout video. Too easy! Using a fitness tracker is another way tech can help get you moving more – including sharing insights and reports on your daily, weekly and monthly progress to keep you motivated and excited about putting on your runners.

Tip 14: Make exercise work

If you're in an office job, you can do some things to mix up the day and fit in exercise. Why not suggest a walking meeting? Otherwise, do a lap of the office every hour and make the most of your lunchtime by including a walk outside in the sunshine.

Tip 15: Carry a drink bottle

More than half of our body is made of water – and we lose between two and a half to three litres every day. Unsurprisingly, replenishing that water is essential for maintaining good health and to carry nutrients and oxygen around our bodies. Carrying a drink bottle will remind you to drink water. Eight cups a day is recommended for women and ten cups for men.

Tip 16: Find a buddy

Having a buddy who'll exercise with you and share your commitment can be the difference between failure and success. Exercise with a friend who is on the same schedule, a co-worker who will go with you on your lunchbreak, or your partner who can cheer you on when you're feeling unmotivated. Choose an exercise buddy who will remind you of your goals and keep you accountable.

Tip 17: Get your shut-eye

While you may feel like you need to sleep less to fit everything in, sleep deprivation can impact poorly on behaviour, concentration, learning and planning. Reduced performance may mean you're actually getting less done. Sleep deprivation can also depress your immune system and affect coordination. Get a better night's sleep by going to bed at the same time every night and avoid scrolling through your phone, eating or watching movies in bed.

Tip 18: Focus on fun

As a busy parent, finding a regular exercise that you actually enjoy doing helps make it less of a chore and more a part of your day you look forward to. So if the mention of a gym makes you feel nauseous, try some out-of-the-box ideas like rock climbing, belly dancing or fencing. If you're motivated by exercising with people, why not get the whole family onboard for a bike ride, or a friendly game of soccer?

Tip 19: Write it down

Creating health and fitness goals – and putting them down in writing – can help you stay motivated and committed. Make them SMART goals: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely. For example, your goal may be to be able to run 10 kilometres without pausing in under one hour! **Remember to keep your goal front and centre, so stick them on your fridge!**

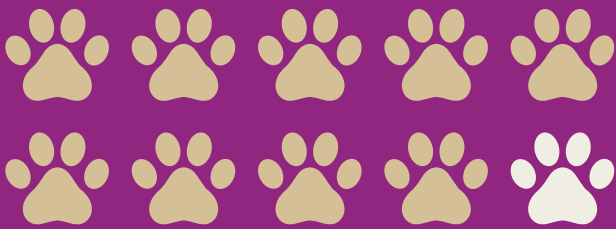
Tip 20: Being sneaky helps...

We're talking exercise here, not junk food. If you're one of those people who feel like they never have time for an exercise session, incorporate it into your normal routine. Get off the bus a couple of stops early, walk up the stairs instead of taking the lift or do some squats during TV ad breaks.





Managing pets



Nearly 9 in 10 families say their pets are part of the family, and almost everyone agrees that owning a pet improves happiness, loneliness, and mental and physical health.

Tip 21: Choose the right pet for your family

Are you a cat or dog person? [Have you considered different breeds?](#) Do you have time to regularly walk your pet? Will brushing and grooming your pet become a chore? Think carefully about the pet that will match your family life – you don't want to add more unwelcome chores to that never-ending list by bringing home the wrong pet.

Tip 22: Think about a rescue pet

Rescue organisations do great work throughout Australia, rehoming dogs, cats and other animals that have no one to look after them. By rescuing a pet, you can help give a pet a second chance with a loving new home. It can also be win-win as rescue pets often come completely trained and vaccinated – they're ready to be loved.

Tip 23: Puppy-proof your house

When preparing for a new arrival of the fluffy variety, a little time spent [puppy-proofing your home](#) will likely save a lot of time down the track. Clear areas of chewable items like hair bands and hide away things like electrical and blind cords. Move poisonous chemicals in the kitchen, bathroom or shed to higher ground.

Tip 24: Make sure they're vaccinated

Even if you don't have other dogs or your dog won't be socialising straight away, it's important to make sure their [vaccinations are up to date](#) before bringing them home. This is not only the safest option but will save you the hassle of having to rush out and get them done once they're in your care.



Tip 25: Get walking (on a loose lead)

Both you and your dog will benefit from a daily walk. Start by taking the lead in your right hand and having treats in your left hand. When your dog pulls out in front of you, stop and change direction. Behaving well on the loose lead can be reinforced by giving a treat.

Tip 26: Teach your dog to sit

Fancy chasing a disobedient dog around the neighbourhood? We didn't think so! Teach your dog to sit by putting some food in your hand and placing it near the tip of its nose. Start moving your hand up and over, towards the back of the dog's head. Your dog should put its bottom down and sit. When it does, give it the food. Good dog!

Tip 27: Put toilet training at the top of your list

While most of us expect to clean up the occasional accident, no one wants to spend day after day cleaning doggy doo from the carpet. Positive reinforcement works best here. Give your dog plenty of opportunities to do the right thing and toilet outside in an allocated spot. When they do the right thing and toilet in that spot, reward them with a pat, praise, a food treat or some time with their favourite chew toy.

Tip 28: Mat training for house dogs

Teaching a dog to sit on a mat in the house means it has a great place to rest and you have a place to send it when you need to get things done. Offering a treat as you lead your dog to its mat will help reinforce this behaviour. Use a release word like "finish" to let your dog know when they can leave the mat.

Tip 29: Try outsourcing

If you're struggling to keep up with grooming and walking, give yourself a break – even if it's just for a few days. Ask around your local area for people who provide affordable dog walking and grooming services. You can also use websites like [Pawshake](#) and [Pets on Me](#) to find trusted dog walkers in your area.

Tip 30: Plan a break

Half of pet owners take their pets along on holidays at least sometimes. These days, it's simple to find dog-friendly holiday options by using niche sites such as [Holidaying with Dogs](#) or using general accommodation websites and selecting "pets allowed" in the search filter.



Family first approach

Being a parent is a busy but rewarding time in your life. Make the most of it and have no regrets by being mindful of how you're using your time. Whether it's staying organised, focusing on a stress-free outlook or staying healthy, keeping these hacks in mind can help you truly transform your family life.

No one has the time to worry about what could happen, let alone coping with the financial or emotional burden of an unexpected event.

Protect your family from unplanned setbacks with Real Life Insurance. Call 1300 957 238 or visit realinsurance.com.au for more information.

