

10 WAYS TO GROW TINY SUPERHUMANS

HOW TO ENABLE THE KIDS IN YOUR LIFE TO LOOK, FEEL
AND PERFORM LIKE OPTIMIZED HUMAN MACHINES



BEN GREENFIELD

I have twin boys.

Their names are River and Terran, and they are six years old. I took this picture of them in Thailand last December, after they did their sixth triathlon:



River and Terran love to do triathlons, and they also do Spartan races, swim 500 meters at a time, run 5K's (albeit quite slowly with stops to play in water fountains and balance on curbs), play the piano, act in theatre musicals, cook Pad Thai, program Lego robots and breakdance much, much better than their father.

Whether you have children, plan on having children, or know children, the wonderful fact is that you live in a privileged era in which you have the ability to enable the kids in your life to be tiny superhumans who look, feel and perform like optimized human machines.

Do you have kids? Grandkids? Nieces or nephews? Are you expecting a little one? The fact is, if you answered yes to any of those questions, you are in a unique position to give the child or children in your life every

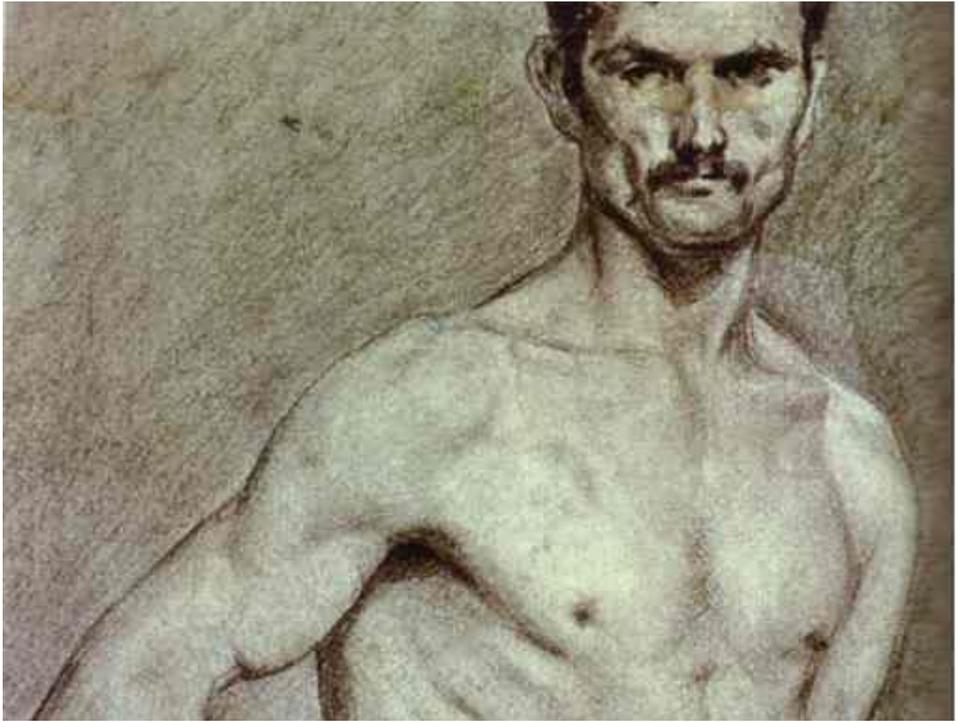
physical and mental advantage possible. And I don't know about you, but I really, really want that for my children.

And if you don't want children, don't like children, and don't know any children, then the cool thing is that the same things that make your kids superhuman make you superhuman too. So you don't have to tune out or quit reading if kids are just...not your thing.

Mozart learned to play the piano at the age of four, composed his first piece at age five and wrote his first symphony at age eight.



Picasso, when he was 12, had a complete grasp of the fundamentals of art and was producing photo-realistic anatomical sketches.



2 weeks ago, we took our children to an art gallery, where there were amazing, and intricate sculptures of fish and bears and bighorn sheep, created by a man who had spent his entire life studying sculpture. Then my wife, who studied art in college, explained to me that some guy named Bernini was churning out sculptures just like this at 8 years old. I looked it up, and it turns out she was right. Just take a look at one of his sculptures below.



But these folks aren't special childhood prodigies, idiot savants, or some kind of weirdo autistic geniuses. These are normal human beings. In our modern era, we've just forgotten how to nurture and grow an amazing human body and mind, and instead settled for a generation that winds up on peopleofwalmart.com. Attached to leashes. Chewing on ritalin.



Yikes. Let's begin, shall we?

#1. Let Them Get Dirty

Now let me ask you a question. Did you eat your own boogers when you were a kid?

Well it turns out, we may actually be hardwired to eat our own boogers. [An Austrian study from last year](#) showed that a kid's snot actually harbor bacteria that, when eaten, helps to strengthen the body's own natural immune system. Now don't worry, that not a giant booger that my son River is eating below (it's a coconut) but it does highlight my first point: that we need to let our kids get dirty.



My kids kiss our dog on the lips. They take an actual, real bath about once every 3 days. They have licked the public bathroom floor at coffee shops, and I have even observed them to rip their diapers off and eat their own poop.

And I don't care.

See, it's no coincidence that in our modern era of antibiotics, antibacterial hand soap, bottle boiling, and daily bathing, we're experiencing new and unparalleled occurrences of problems like autoimmunity, autism, ADD, food allergies, leaky gut and obesity in our kids.

The reason for this is that a child's immune system gets stronger when it's exposed to dirt, germs, bacteria, viruses and even parasites! So if you protect your kid from things such as animal poop, dirt, farm animals, lots of other kids, and of course, boogers, they don't develop their immune systems the right way - and they grow up more likely to have issues like skin disorders, gut issues and allergies.

On a very related note, I was actually pretty bummed that my wife got a c-section. And wasn't because it ruined her abs (because it didn't - I have to say that, she might read this someday).

It's because babies born via c-section have been proven to have weaker guts, worse immune systems, and lower amounts of good bacteria! This is also why babies who are breastfed develop healthier immune systems, since breastmilk contains good bacteria that colonize the gut. Incidentally, this is also why if you weren't breastfed or never shot down your mom's vagina, you can actually benefit quite a bit from using probiotics, eating fermented foods and also using a type of supplement called "colostrum", which comes from animal breastmilk. So quick - go call your mom and ask her if you were breastfed or born vaginally, then act accordingly.

When I pick my kids up from kid care at the YMCA, I sometimes get strange looks from the other parents, because I got out of my way to remind my kids not to use the antibacterial hand soap. That stuff can create nasty superbugs that actually can hurt your kids. So can antibiotics.

I also only use soap in the shower once every 2 or 3 days, and the rest of the time just rinse with water. Same thing for my kids. Let those dirt and soil-based organisms thrive on your child's skin! If "no soap showers" are just not your thing, then you may be interested in this [New York Times report on AOBiome](#), a biotech start-up that has created a Refreshing Cosmetic Mist which contains billions of cultivated bacteria commonly found in dirt and untreated water - so now you can basically pay for an expensive skin cosmetic to get the same thing you'd get from rolling around in your lawn.

So how else can you get your kids dirty? Consider that children who grow up on farms and in large families actually have stronger immune systems. So go get a horse! I'm just kidding, you don't have to have a horse. Or chickens. But you should let your kids have pets that they get down and dirty with, and if a dog or cat or guinea pig or hermit crab or goldfish or snake or tarantula isn't an option for you, then at least let your kids play with as many other kids as possible.

And by the way - have you ever eaten natto? It's slimy, snotty, gooey fermented soybeans, and mostly come in this little white cup with a little orange Japanese cartoon character guy on the side. Just the other morning, I walked in on my son Terran eating a giant spoonful of the stuff he had

found in a container in the fridge. It appeared he had dumped a little organic ketchup on there. I personally prefer natto with a little white rice and mustard, but to each their own. My kids eat lots of other fermented, bacteria-rich foods too like kimchi, sauerkraut, kefir, yogurt, and kombucha. Your kids should do the same, and you should do that too. It's all bacteria, it's dirty and it's awesome for you.

#2: Let Them Eat Fat

So speaking of weird foods, here's point number two: let them eat fat.

The photo below is of my son River eating his bone marrow.



Bone marrow is chock full of healthy fats, DHA and fat soluble vitamins, which are all incredibly important for your kid's brain, hormones and nervous system. In her [book Deep Nutrition](#), Cate Shahanan, who works with the LA Lakers professional basketball team, outlines four important factors that have been proven to determine beauty and symmetry in facial

development of babies and kids. Those four factors are Vitamin A, D E and K. Does anybody know what makes all those vitamins similar?

That's right: they're all the fat soluble vitamins.

Let's take Vitamin K2 for example. It keeps kids from getting calcified growth plates. That stunts their growth. It is only found in animal-based fats. So my kids also drink bone broth, eat sardines out of the can (and drink the oil), and consume plenty of egg yolks and grass fed butter.

You know how walnuts are shaped like little brains? Those are also really good for your child's brain. My kids have a big handful of raw walnuts every morning - right before they eat eggs scrambled in bacon fat.

So what should your children not eat? They shouldn't eat egg whites, they shouldn't eat fat-free cereals, and they shouldn't eat low-fat yogurt. They should eat brain food instead – fats (incidentally, this is also why I test my blood four times a year to make sure my total cholesterol stays above 200 - because I know that [as author Nora Gedgaudas points out in this excellent presentation, a cholesterol below 200 is associated with low IQ](#)).

By the way, kids who have low intake of essential fats also have higher levels of ADD, autism and aggression. But some aggression is actually, OK - which leads me to point #3: let your kid's fight.

#3: Let Them Fight

Those are my boys kickboxing in Thailand. They fight like me - they go straight for the vital organs.



At home, we have this game we play. It's called takedown. I get down into a low squat position, and then my boys run at me and try to take me down (be careful with this game if your kids are still at crotch height).

Another game we play is that I lie down on the ground on my stomach, both my boys get on top of me, and my task is that I simply have to try to throw them off and stand up. And then of course we play the one where I put the Rocky 3 soundtrack on Pandora streaming radio and we just fight for rounds until we're all exhausted. Anything goes, although the boys know that if they bite, scratch, claw or go for any cheap shots that it "hurts daddy".

Roughhousing and fighting is so, so important for your kids. It teaches them how to adapt quickly to unpredictable situations. It teaches them how to deal with pain and discomfort and even losing sometimes (especially if you don't always let them win, which you shouldn't do).

How about this: did you know that the amount of roughhousing kids do actually predicts their achievement in first grade better than their kindergarten test scores do? This is because roughhousing increases levels of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), which increases neuron growth.

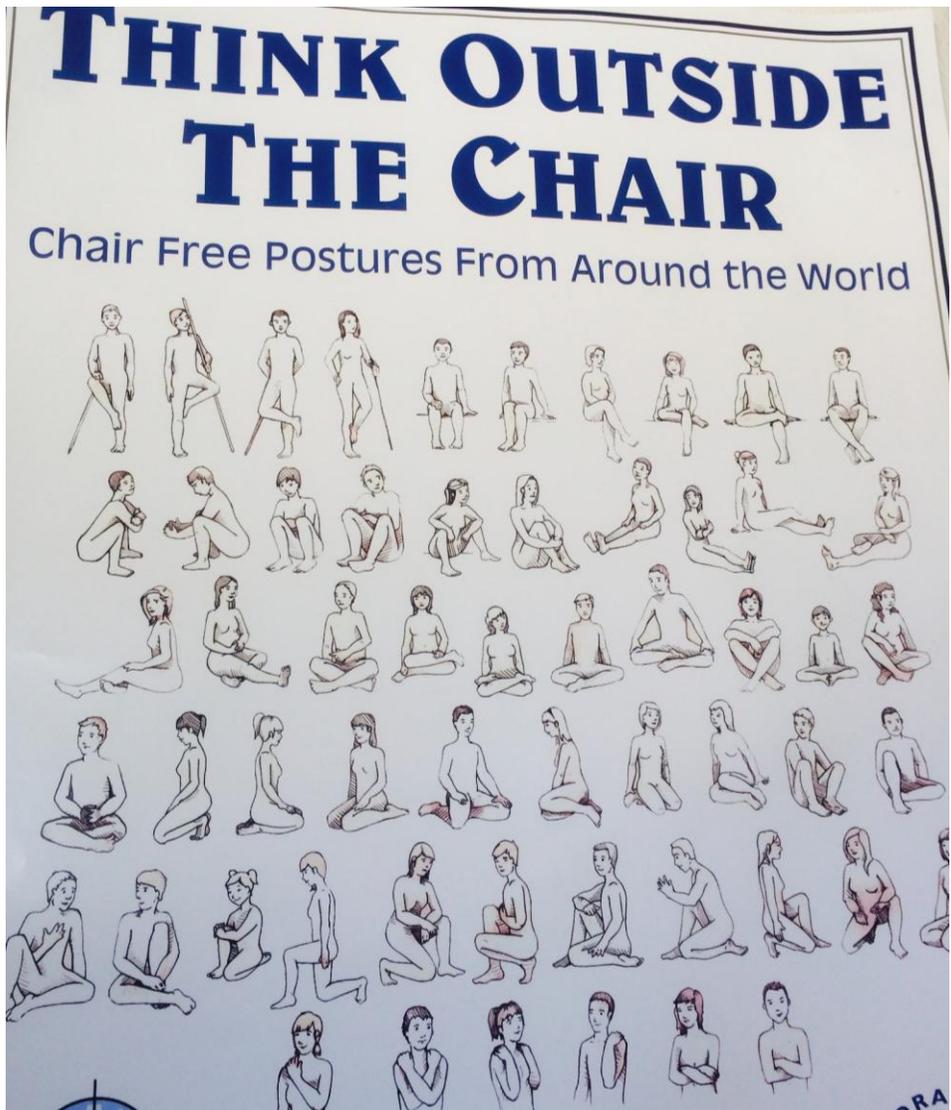
You might think that roughhousing would make your kid more violent, but that's simply not so. It's actually the opposite: kids who roughhouse are more socially and emotionally mature than kids who don't, because they understand the difference between play and aggression, between kindness and hostility, and they learn to stick to rules of morality better. Roughhousing also makes you bond stronger with your kids, because it causes both of you to make more oxytocin, which is the same bonding hormone that gets released during things like sex and breastfeeding.

And of course, roughhousing gets your kids physically active, which I don't have to tell you is a huge missing component of kids' lives these days...and which leads me to point #4.

#4: Let Them Stand

This widespread lack of physical activity is why you should let your kids stand. A lot.

This is the poster that hangs on the wall of my office:



It comes from a book called "World Distribution of Certain Postural Habits", which I first learned about [when I interviewed biomechanist Katy Bowman on my podcast](#) and it shows you over 50 different positions you

could be in during your workday. It's like the Kama sutra of standing workstations. I'm going to try a new position right now actually. I just switched into a lunging position as I write this.

Now you've probably seen the [news that "sitting is the new smoking"](#) and that having your butt planted in a chair for 8+ hours a day or even for 2 hours at any given time is one of the worst things you can do for fat loss and heart health. It actually doesn't even matter how much you exercise at the end of the day. It just matters how much you got up and around during the day.

Just a moment...I'm going to switch from a lunge to a squat now.

Well they've done the same research in kids. [A new study last year gave kids the option of using standing desks for an entire school year.](#) Over 90% of the kids chose to stand, and those that did burned nearly 100 extra calories a day. [Another study](#) found that totally irrespective of the total time kids spend sitting or standing, the more frequent the breaks in sedentary time, the lower the health risk for everything. Weight, blood pressure, blood sugar, bad cholesterol, everything.

One moment, I'm going to stand now.

So recess is good. So are standing workstations. They make them for kids. Check out companies like [Updesk](#) or [Focal Upright](#) or [Varidesk](#).

#5: Let Their Feet Free

And when your kids are standing, you may as well let their feet free.

I have a confession to make. I am very, very uncomfortable when I am standing around at a party or social gathering wearing shoes. I don't like shoes. As a matter of fact, I avoid shoes (and sometimes pants too) when I'm working at home. I am that guy who sits around writing in my boxers.

My kids also rarely wear shoes. Like some kind of ancient tribesman (or their own dad) they have ugly, calloused, tough, bulletproof feet. They play outside, hike, run, stand, and move and of course, do their hotel gym treadmill Prowler workout pictured below – all primarily barefoot.



The reason for the importance of letting your child's feet free is that the shape and density of your kid's bones is a direct result of the loads and geometry placed on their body. So this means that the way your child's foot is loaded will affect the lifelong shape of their pelvis, their hips, their knees, their back and even the space in their chest that their lungs are in!

This is why kids with poor posture grow up to be adults with poor posture. [Kids who haven't had their bones exposed to a variety of loads such as running, or lifting and moving objects have been shown to have lower bone density later in life and to suffer from flat feet.](#) And pediatric research is now showing that overprotective, built-up, stabilizing, modern footwear can interfere with the development of your kid's foot strength, ankle stability, and movement patterns for the rest of their life. Your child's foot muscles atrophy and foot bones degrade.

Fortunately, this is all reversible. Of course, you just can't reverse it in 2 weeks by buying Vibram Five Fingers, getting a stress fracture, then filing a lawsuit. It takes patience. Most of my clients need 1-2 years to make a full transition back to developing strong and natural feet if they've been

wearing cushioned, overprotected shoes much of their life. But with kids, things happen faster. Kids can reshape and redevelop foot structure and bones within just three months.

So besides avoiding modern, built-up shoes, what else can you do to give your kids superhuman feet?

-Choose shoes that are super flexible or minimalist. Good brands include Vibram, Vivo Barefoot, Happy Little Soles, Bobux, Merrell and Nike Free.

-Play foot games with your kids to encourage motor skills and healthy foot development. For example, they can pick up marbles with their feet and put them into a cup.

-Massage your child's feet for a few minutes before bedtime.

-Use [Happy Feet Socks](#), which spreads the toes and strengthens the feet. You can wear these too.

-If you live near sand, let your kids run and walk in sand, which is one of the best ways to both strengthen and stretch the feet.

#6: Let Them Play

So now that your kids are eating boogers, breastfeeding and barefoot, it's time to kick them outside and walk away.

See this photo below?



The photo appeared in an article in The Atlantic called "[The Over Protected Kid](#)". It's a photo of a place called "The Land", which is an adventure playground in this little housing development in North Wales.

Notice how there's no fancy playground structure with a shiny metal slide and a bright red steering wheel and a tic-tac-toe board. There's yellow seesaw with a central balance to make sure nobody falls off. There's no little rubber bucket swing for the babies. There are some old tires and pieces of wood. There's a frayed rope swing that carries you over a creek. If you can make it that far. The article talks about how the day the journalist was there researching the article, the kids were mostly playing with elderly persons' walker that was, at any given time, used as a scooter, a jail cell, and a gymnastics bar.

A preoccupation with safety has stripped our kids of independence, risk taking, and discovery. Kids who don't have a chance to solve their own

problems, control their own decisions, and follow an internal moral compass grow up feeling less in control of their own lives and fate. They don't learn to, as author James Altucher says, "[Choose Yourself](#)".

In an essay called "[The Play Deficit](#)" in movements like [Free Schooling](#) and [UnSchooling](#), and in books like [Free Range Kids](#), [Duct Tape Parenting](#), [Baby Knows Best](#), the [The Kids Will Be Fine](#) it's shown how the loss of unstructured free play - and a set of strict, rigid play and schooling rules - has resulted in depression, narcissism, and a loss of creative thinking and empathy in our kids..

I grew up on 6 acres of land.

I was homeschooled.

I would finish school by 11 and then play outside until it literally got dark. My parents never called me in for dinner or came out to find me. I just showed up, somehow alive, and having learned a heckuva lot about the world around me, about making decisions, solving problems, exerting self control, and following rules set by me and my tribe of friends.

And look at me. I'm pretty messed up but at least I'm still alive and doing what I passionately love (which is mostly still just playing outside).

My kids are now growing up on 10 acres of land. We do the same thing and simply kick them out the door. They just go. Their exercise and physical activity isn't always supervised by a soccer coach and sideline and their playground isn't always lined with fences and that special soft rubber gravel substitute stuff. Of course, we try to make sure there are no major hazards like mountain lions and bear traps in the general vicinity our kids our playing in.

But we also understand that there is a big difference between avoiding major hazards and having our kids grow up in a protected bubble. Growing tiny super humans isn't about creating perfect kids. It's about creating resilient, free-thinking, free-spirited kids who can survive in unpredictable situations, and who perhaps even think beyond the realm of growing up to be a factory worker or drone, completely void of creativity.

#7: Let Them Join



That's me, doing push-ups with two cowboys along for the ride, and both my wife and I go out of our way to include our kids in our workouts as much as possible.

There was this [very interesting study done at the University of Essex](#), and in the study, they asked kids to rate how active they thought their parents

were, then they had those kids complete a test of their own cardio fitness - in this case a bleep test, where a loud bleep sounds, you run about 20 meters, and then the bleep sounds again and you run again, basically running back and forth with increasingly shorter recovery times until you're completely exhausted.

What researchers found was that how well a child did on a bleep test was directly influenced by how active and fit that child perceived their parents to be. In other words, the fitter and more physically active your child thinks that you are, the fitter and more physically active your child will be.

So how can you include your kids in your workouts?

Here are some ideas:

We do push-ups, body weight squats, crawls, crab walks, overhead presses and hill sprints with our kids wrapped around our backs, torso and chests. Obviously, if your child is 15 years old this may be a fast track to a hernia, but if you've got young children, you can simply use them as your weights, and they love it. You get more of that oxytocin release I mentioned earlier too.

We play follow the leader with our kids, where we'll go on a hike in the forest or a walk in the neighborhood and use the world as our playground, balancing on fences, picking up heavy rocks, climbing on obstacles like walls and park benches, carrying each other, crawling, jumping, rolling, walking backwards, walking sideways and moving in as many fun ways as possible.

I even swim with my kids on my back, especially when we're traveling as a family and at the short little hotel pools.

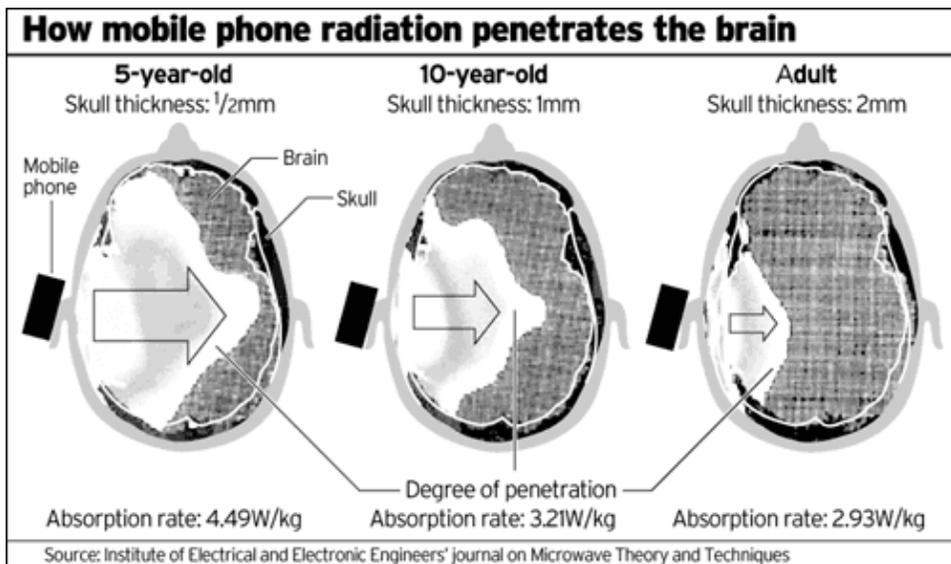
Since our kids were born, we've also used jogging strollers for uphill sprint repeats and runs and pool kickboards for the kids to kick beside us when we swim laps. We have a local neighborhood family yoga class that we take our kids to. We drop in for family Zumba at our YMCA. We also have mini kettlebells and mini medicine balls at home for the kids to join in our living room workouts. We play tennis at the park and basketball in the backyard. I'm learning to breakdance right now with my kids using a breakdance DVD.

When it comes to making your children a part of your workout, the sky's the limit - and if you want to grow tiny super humans, you must think beyond confining yourself to a treadmill and your mp3 player and doing your workout at 4am when nobody is watching.

#8: Let Them Unplug

WE HOMESCHOOL OUR KIDS BUT PULLED THEM OUT OF ONLINE SCHOOL, AND WE ALSO UNPLUG OUR WIFIROUTER AT NIGHT

As your kids begin to get dirty, do more unstructured play, do workouts with you, and sit less, you're going to find that they (and hopefully you) naturally spend less time on devices. And this is a good thing.



The photo above shows how mobile phone radiation penetrates your brain. It's why every phone has a warning label that tells you to keep distance between the phone and your body. It's why my phone is either always in airplane mode or, if I'm using it, hooked up to a special kind of headset called an "[air tube headset](#)". And it's also why, based on the absorption of

a cell phone signal through a child skull being twice that of an adult skull, that I take special steps to ensure I'm not frying my kids.

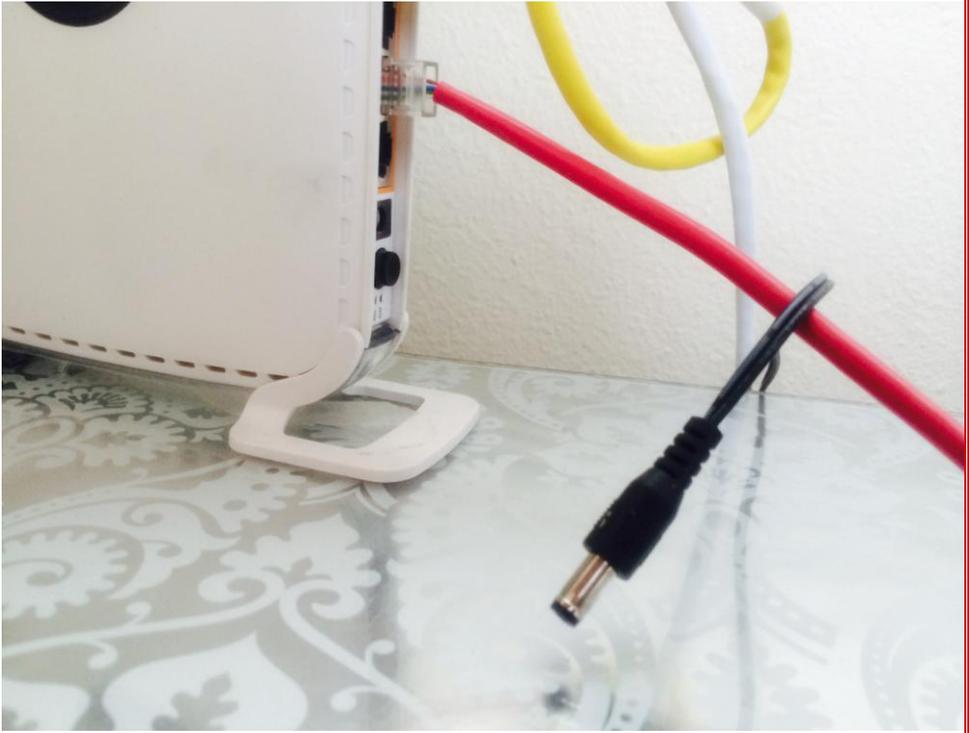
From neural degradation, to insomnia, cancer and ADD, there are [thousands of studies on Electromagnetic Fields](#) - or EMF's, particularly with regard to children's health. From smart phones, to WiFi routers, to computers, to game consoles, to smart meters to microwaves, television and cell towers, EMF's can be prevalent in just about every aspect of your child's life.

And you know what's scary?

Kids absorb far more EMF than adults. This is because their body has a higher water content, which makes them more conductive to radiation. They've also got thinner skulls, a growing brain and rapidly dividing cells, making them all the more susceptible to damage.

So at our house, we have [dirty electricity filters](#) plugged into each room of the house. We have electrical kill switches in every bedroom of the house. We do not use our microwave, ever. We play outside instead of using gaming consoles like Wii and playstation. Our kids don't use smartphones, iPads or laptops - and we won't be introducing these until they understand the importance of keeping devices clear of their ears, heads and the little growing gonads in their laps. It's kind of funny because I tell people we have a completely stupid home - the opposite of smart home - there are almost zero wireless signals or bluetooth signals.

As a matter of fact, here's what our wireless router looks like right now. It's unplugged. I'm instead hardwired into the router.



And this quiet, stupid little home is also very important for another thing that is crucial for creating a tiny superhuman: sleep.

#9: Let Them Sleep



Every night, week after week, month after month, year after year, we have the same bedtime routine in our house.

Our kids put on their pajamas and brush their teeth ([fluoride free toothpaste of course, which I discuss in my “Detox Your Home” article](#)). Then we snuggle up in their bed and I read them a story. We each list one thing that we’re grateful for. And finally, I sing and play them a song on my guitar.

And for that bedtime routine there is no blaring television, no phones, no iPads, no bright lights, and no other such melatonin disruptors. Occasionally, the kids will even come curl up in my bed, where I have a full body warming red light bulb (which is one of the best little [ten dollar sleep hacking investments](#) you’ll ever make for your own sleep quality).

Sleep is when your cells and the nervous system repair. It’s when memories form and the day’s important lessons are cemented. So by cutting down on sleep, we learn less, we develop less, we are less bright, we make worse decisions, we accomplish less, we are less productive, we

are more prone to errors, and we undermine our and our children's true intellectual potential!

Sadly, a child sleeps an average of an hour less a night than they did thirty years ago. A big part of this is our post-industrial infatuation with productivity. We think:

...it is ok to use an alarm clock to cut sleep short.

...it is ok to work in shifts.

...it is ok to travel people, including kids, around the world through multiple time zones and assume the body just bounces right back.

...it is ok to save time by sleeping less and working more.

...it is ok to pull kids out of bed in time for school.

It's [even been shown](#) that daylight savings time, designed by our government to save energy and fuel, actually alters your child's fragile internal body clock twice a year, and that results in lower SAT scores compared to states like Arizona, which observe standard time all year long.

Probably the worst part of all this is that little kids around the world are woken up early in the morning to go to school to "learn". Not only do those kids get stressed and cranky, their immune systems undermined and their growth blunted. [Some sleep researchers who understand this problem are now trying to battle the establishment for more school schedules that allow kids to go to school one to two hours later](#) - and I realize that a giant groan is growing in the throats of those of you who would rather your kids not be still hanging around your house at 8am in the morning!

But my optimistic prediction is that, sooner or later, governments, school authorities, and parents will realize that late bedtimes due to overloading with homework and the use of an alarm clock to rip kids from their beds contradicts the very goals of education.

So do you want your kids to become superhuman? Then let them sleep!

#10. Let Them Relax

And finally, let your kids relax.



How many of you have been laying next to your spouse or significant other at night and just felt like something wasn't quite right? You felt the energy in the room was just off.

Or maybe you just had hot crazy wild sex and everything seems so, so right. It's like you're one. It's like your hearts are beating in rhythm.

Well, the amazing thing is that your hearts literally are synced.

See, [your heart is the most powerful generator of electromagnetic energy in your entire body, and your heart's electrical field is 60 times bigger than your brain's!](#) Your heart is also connected to your brain via something called the vagus nerve, and this means that your heart signal can directly affect other people's hearts, their brains, their mood and their entire body.

This also means that an intimate connection of heart-brain synchronization can occur between two people - or in the case of the photo above, between a person and an animal. Your heart's electrical field literally extends out in all directions in the space around you, and it touches anyone within 8 - 10 feet of where you are sitting right now.

Now just imagine that you are in your home with your child. And imagine that your heart is racing. You are stressed. You are running from a lion that is jumping out from your email inbox, rushing around the house with your phone clutched to your neck, and hurriedly trying to make dinner. All at the same time.

Your child actually feels that. It affects them. Your heart signal has a direct impact on your children's stress levels. And this stress affects their brain long term.

This is why, every morning, before I get out of bed, the first thing I do is measure something called "[heart rate variability](#)", which is a direct quantification of the heart's electrical rhythms, and gives you instant feedback of whether you have a healthy balance between your "fight and flight" nervous system and your "rest and digest" nervous system. (Well, that's actually not the first thing I do. The first thing I do is use UJ's 5 Minute Journal)

And if my stress is imbalanced in the morning, I don't get out of bed until I've fixed the imbalance. Because I know it affects my family. It affects my kids. It even affects my dog!

If I find myself engaged in shallow chest breathing, or irritable, or moody, or rushed, or stressed during the workday, I stop again and fix the imbalance. I have a home office, and I know that if I'm stressed, and if my children are in the vicinity, they can instantly sense that, without me saying a thing. It's just the way us humans are wired.

So who wants to know how to instantly fix stress and bring your heart's electrical rhythms back into balance?

It's called the [Quick Coherence Technique](#). You can easily teach it to your kids. And I'll teach it to you right now. Do you want to learn it?

OK, let's do this.

Close your eyes. Wait – keep them open. You're reading. But when you memorize this routine, then begin doing it with your eyes closed. Now breathe. Deep nasal breathing. Deep from your belly.

First, focus your attention on the area around your heart, the area in the center of your chest. If you want, you can place your hand over the center of your chest to help keep your attention in your heart area. If you're teaching this to the children in your life, have them put their hands on their heart. It's important that you teach your children feel their heart and know right where it is physically located.

Now - imagine that your breath is coming in and going out through your heart area. Just find that natural breathing rhythm that feels good to you. And every breath is coming in and out through that heart area - every breath of oxygen feeding right into your heart.

Next, think of a positive feeling. Let's get even more specific. Think of a child in your life. Your son, your daughter, your niece, your nephew, your grandkid. Imagine their face. Their laugh. Their smile. Imagine their soft hair up against your cheeks as you snuggle them.

Hold them tight.

Feel their smooth skin. And let those positive emotions wash over you, and breathe those emotions, feel those emotions, going straight into your heart.

Mmm...

...now, when you're ready, open your eyes.

What you have just learned you can anytime, anyplace.

You can teach yourself to achieve that feeling within just 10 seconds. It's the most powerful stress reducing, relaxation technique I can give you. And better yet, if you take one thing from this little book, go to the child in your life and teach this technique to them.

Give them that gift.

And they will become superhuman. I hope you will too.

Thank you for reading.
