

# Failsafe food for families

Providing a snack of watermelon, grapes and strawberries seems like the sensible and healthy option for your toddler. We thought so but didn't realise that these foods were dynamite to our little boy, writes **Sara Donald**



## Family Matters

**J**onty was four and a half before we read about food intolerances and realised that these foods were making him behave in ways that were turning our family life into a nightmare. Climbing book cases, throwing books, running non-stop up and down hallways, whingeing, defiance and a restless irritability were just some of Jonty's daily patterns.

My husband and I were exhausted.

"I feel like I'm constantly working double shifts," I remember complaining to him.

Up at 5am, we would "go" until about 2pm when Jonty crashed for about two hours. Then he'd wake up and we couldn't get him back to bed until 10 o'clock at night.

Taking him to my local doctor to discuss his behaviour, I was told that Jonty needed "more boundaries". I remember walking away feeling extremely confused by this advice as my husband and I were big believers in being firm and setting limits.

Adding our second son, Finn, to the mix when Jonty was two and a half put even more pressure on our ability to cope. Shattered by the demands of two little boys, I would often put them both into their cots and just collapse into bed.

Walking into my local library one day, (Finn in the stroller and

Jonty running beside it), I noticed a book that would change our lives. Stirring the spaghetti that night, book in hand, I began to devour every word of *Fed Up – Understanding how food affects your child and what you can do about it* – by Sue Dengate.

Dengate explains how there have been big changes in our national diet: "party foods have become everyday foods, additives which did not even exist are eaten frequently and flavour enhancers are common," she writes.

After finishing the book we put Jonty on a FAILSAFE diet (Free of additives and low in salicylates, amines and flavour enhancers).

Salicylates are chemicals found in foods such as watermelon, oranges, tomatoes, strawberries and grapes – all the foods that we'd been feeding Jonty.

Eliminating salicylates from his diet and also foods containing preservatives, colours (even natural ones) or flavour enhancers changed his life and ours.

Almost overnight Jonty became considerate, kind, patient, caring and, importantly, our frantic family became a much calmer one.

Sue Dengate has acknowledged the foundational work of the RPAH Allergy Unit in formulating FAILSAFE. Dr Anne Swain, of

the allergy clinic at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, studied food intolerance for her PhD and says "The FAILSAFE diet is based on the RPAH Elimination Diet developed by myself, Dr Velencia Soutter and Dr Robert Loblay."

Responding positively when asked whether she would recommend the RPAH Elimination Diet to families struggling with the behaviour of their children, Dr Swain says: "Yes, we would recommend the diet as a diagnostic tool to identify if food intolerance has a role in children's behaviour. Followed by challenges to identify the triggers as they vary from one child to another. Responses are individual."

Now nine, Jonty has recently attended a Creative Arts Camp for gifted and talented children and is thriving academically at school. We credit Sue Dengate's book and the RPAH Elimination Diet with making our family life healthier and happier.

For more on food intolerance or the elimination diet go to: [www.sswahs.nsw.gov.au/rpa/allergy](http://www.sswahs.nsw.gov.au/rpa/allergy) or [allergy@email.cs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:allergy@email.cs.nsw.gov.au). Sue Dengate's *Fed Up* is available in good bookstores (\$24.95) or online from publisher HarperCollins: \$23.50 including GST, p&p.

Above: *Family Matters* columnist Sara Donald (BA '93 DipEd '95)

# You can make a difference

Eschewing the consumer society that I'd been brought up in became my priority during my idealistic 20s and I made a couple of trips, with my husband Jef, to work in the slums of India.

When we had our first child we quickly realised that jaunts overseas to third world countries would become less frequent, if not impossible. (To all those out there who continue their travels with babes in their backpacks - you have my admiration).

But leaving full-time work and moving to suburbia to raise our family didn't mean that I was any less concerned about poverty or wanting to effect positive change in the world - particularly for marginalised women who face gender-based discrimination on a daily basis.

To a large extent my membership of UNIFEM - the United Nations Development Fund for Women - has kept me in touch with issues affecting women in developing countries.

UNIFEM Australia is a voluntary organisation which provides financial and technical assistance to programs and strategies to foster women's empowerment and gender equality.

Some of the projects, which UNIFEM Australia has supported, include building sustainable livelihoods for Cambodian women through training and development of a handicrafts industry; and economic empowerment through improved production and marketing of traditional weaving in East Timor.

Supporting UNIFEM events during the year has been a way for me to feel connected to a wider world. Last March, I was invited into the studios of 1233 ABC Newcastle to be interviewed as part of the celebrations for International Women's Day; and I made sure I bought a White Ribbon on November 25th just past as part of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

Daily decisions such as what to put in the kids' lunchboxes, what shoes to wear, hair up or down or, at

the end of the day, mashed potato or baked potato, zucchini or broccoli (or both) don't seem quite so humdrum when I know that, even from my suburban kitchen, I'm linked into a global organisation which aims to improve the conditions under which women work and live. SD  
More information: [www.unifem.org](http://www.unifem.org)

## Josh Jagelman (BEd (Primary) '97) is in the Q&A chair

### *Why this degree?*

I really wanted to do pediatric medicine but my TER wasn't high enough. If I'd only studied a few more hours... or went to fewer nightclubs...

### *Expectations of your degree?*

Between school and University I spent 12 months living in a rubbish dump in Latin America - the place was crawling with orphans who had never known any kind of parent figure or carer; they had quite literally come to consciousness in a pile of rubbish. I wanted my degree to equip me with something more than "love" to give to abused and traumatised children.

### *Where are you now?*

I am living in southwest China in a rural city near Laos and Burma. I have seven absolutely amazing children; one from a previous relationship; five adopted and one natural child with my current partner. We are planning to have one more child together (but hoping for twins or triplets).

### *What does your family do for fun?*

Food and travel make up about 90 per cent of our recreational activities; we often pop over to Laos to hang with village friends and eat local cuisine; sometimes we go all the way down to Thailand if we feel like spoiling ourselves. Our family also loves to swim! Must be the Aussie influence - we are usually at a local hotel pool every weekend - sun or rain (there is no real winter here).



### *What have been the pivotal points in your career?*

Great relationships with parents and students just couldn't compete with the bigoted, hypocritical crap I had to put up with from colleagues and administration. After three years I left the NSW public system and headed back to Latin America - which eventually led me to Asia, and where I am today.

### *Future plans?*

I'm in the middle of starting an English training business - I want to try out a few ideas and hope to make some money along the way. If the business is successful it shouldn't take up more than 5 per cent of our time. Then we want to take up a job offer to become the provincial coordinator for child services with an international NGO. Travelling all over southern China helping people, projects, organisations and government to help children as best they can is my dream job! Next, we plan to move closer to Burma (and hopefully into Burma itself one day) and start up a community for severely traumatised orphans, of which there are many in this area.

Josh Jagelman (above) living and working in China with kids