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What’s Up, Doc?
Guys, it’s time to get proactive about your health. WebMD contributing writer Matt McMillen quizzes two top docs to find out the top questions you need to ask at your next doctor’s appointment.

fitness

Life Force
Actor Matthew McConaughey is best known for his good looks, his myriad roles, and his laid-back lifestyle. When he’s not on set, the Magic Mike star is helping inner-city teens stay out of trouble and in good health through his J.K. Livin’ Foundation. McConaughey talks to WebMD contributing writer Lauren Paige Kennedy about the foundation and why it’s so important to him. He also remembers his dad, who inspired him to start it in the first place. PLUS The father of two shares the most important lessons he learned from his dad.

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Cover Photo by Justin Stephens/August
actor and honorary Malibu man) Matthew McConaughey is famed not only for his hit films—*The Lincoln Lawyer, Tropic Thunder, Killers*—but also for his traffic-stopping, handsome looks. Still, his good deeds might eclipse the seemingly indelible public impression of those cerulean blue eyes and washboard abs.

McConaughey, 42, is the force behind J.K. Livin’ Foundation (jklivinfoundation.org), which funds an after-school fitness and wellness program for some of the nation’s most vulnerable inner-city teenagers. J.K. Livin’ is shorthand for “just keep living,” a personal mantra inspired by the passing of his father, who died just as the actor’s career went full tilt with 1993’s cult classic *Dazed and Confused*.

The actor, now starring in the Steven Soderbergh comedy *Magic Mike*, which premieres June 29, was interested in working with teens who are “in that transition age, where the consequences aren’t just another demerit if you screw...
Many of the program’s participants come from single-parent homes, some with a harried mother struggling to keep it all together. Many have expressed surprise, McConaughey marvels, that J.K. Livin’ is willing to give them so much time and attention. Others, he says, report: “I’m less stressed when I get home [now]. I’ve got more respect for all my mom does, how hard she works. You showed me that.”

McConaughey credits his own father, who “always taught me to give back,” with inspiring him to launch the foundation. It’s also the reason the actor expects the program’s kids to show up for their communities.

“Yeah, it’s free,” he says of his foundation. “But it can’t be a one-way street. You get more out of what’s given to you when what’s given to you demands you give something back. We introduced communuity service. I didn’t know how the kids would react. I thought they’d say, ‘No, man, I ain’t giving up my Saturday to go down and pack up food for the troops in Afghanistan!’ But they love it and fully participate. They take more pride, and it gives the program a little more teeth, because it demands time and effort from the kids. They love that responsibility.”

He shows up for them, too, frequently surprising “his” kids at all 14 locations when he’s not shooting a film. “He’ll call me and say, ‘I’m going to join the kids for a jog,’” says Shannon Rotenberg, the foundation’s executive director. “He’s there, working out with them, all the time.”

McConaughey also talks and lives the importance of staying positive, which he says he learned from his hard-working parents. (Dad ran an oil pipe supply business; Mom was a substitute school teacher.) “One adage we grew up on was: ‘You sound like the kid who’s gripin’ about not having any shoes. But what about the kid with no feet?’ What do you say to that?”

The actor says such life lessons led to “not taking things for granted. I remind myself each day: This day wasn’t given to you. You are guaranteed. You woke up. Your kids are healthy. Your woman’s good. You got a house. You put meals on the table. I’m not saying I don’t need to do more in life. I’m saying you better damn well be grateful, and if you don’t shake hands and say thank you—whether that’s to yourself or to God—it’s really gonna stop the circulation and keep other good things from coming into your life.”

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

More than 72 million children age 18 years and younger live in the United States. An astonishing 31.9 million of these kids are in low-income families, with 15.5 million in “poor” families, defined by federal standards as households earning $22,050 or less per year. According to Yumiko Aratani, PhD, senior research associate at the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), low-income children need several things to succeed academically, physically, socially, and professionally. Exercise and healthy eating are just a part of the puzzle, she says. Poor kids need the basics. This means steady, nourishing diets—plus plenty of structure and TLC. “NCCP’s research shows that about one-third of America’s children living in poverty lack consistent access to adequate food,” Aratani says. But changing unhealthy eating habits isn’t enough. Previous research finds that to become resilient, children need a close relationship to a caring parental figure, plus parenting styles that are warm, structured, and involve high expectations, she says.

Good food and good grades are linked. McConaughey says “children with healthy diets are less likely to report depression and stress. And exercise is also known to prevent depression and stress and promote self-esteem.” In other words, when a kid feels good about himself, he’s more likely to care about achievement. Aratani adds that “a combination of healthy eating and exercise can contribute to high school graduation rates, even among the poorest of teens.”

Mentoring works. J.K. Livin’ aims to provide adult guidance to kids who need it most. Aratani points to a recent NCCP study evaluating the effectiveness of youth-development programs. The results emphasized “the importance of a caring adult-youth relationship,” she says. “Mentors help establish an identity independent from family...and can provide guidance and protection.” She stresses, however, that it’s crucial to create meaningful, sustainable mentor-mentee matches, with mentors undergoing “careful screening, training, and supervision” for effective results.—LPK

“We want kids to have and to understand gratitude, to open doors to new things coming into your life.”

McConaughey and San Francisco 49ers football players work out with J.K. Livin’ students at the 49ers Academy School. Above, McConaughey at an L.A. Dodgers game with J.K. Livin’ program kids.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

“IT TAKES A VILLAGE”

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McConaughey in his breakout hit Dazed and Confused, The Wedding Planner with Jennifer Lopez, and Magic Mike, opening June 29, with Channing Tatum.
**Father Knows Best**

Father’s Day is upon us, so we asked the star of Magic Mike to share life lessons he learned from his dad, James, who died 19 years ago. Matthew McConaughey relates some wise advice that guides him as well as the kids he mentors at the J.K. Livin’ Foundation.

“Lend a helping hand when you can.” The J.K. Livin’ Foundation has mentored about 2,000 teenagers since 2008, with aims of becoming a pilot program for schools across the nation.

“Have a good work ethic. Respect the value of a dollar.” The star has worked steadily in both blockbusters and smaller films since his first breakout role in 1993. He lives quietly with his family in Austin, Texas.

“Get outdoors when you can.” McConaughey has made headlines for camping in an Airstream trailer on the beaches of Malibu.

“Life ain’t easy. And nobody said it would be.” Bromance buddy and fellow Texan Lance Armstrong has had his ups and downs, both professionally and personally. McConaughey has long cheered on the champion cyclist and cancer survivor.

“Always root for the underdog.” The actor earned rave reviews for his inspiring performance in the true-story drama, We Are Marshall, in which he plays the coach to a demoralized team of college football players who’ve just lost members of their squad to a plane crash.

“Don’t say ‘I can’t.’ But you can say, ‘I’m having trouble.’” The actor lost his father right around the time he landed his first big break in 1993. But he found success after grief.

“Respect women.” His romantic comedies— Failure to Launch, Fool’s Gold, and How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days among them—pit smart women against less-than-perfect letharies who rise to the occasion.

“Just keep livin’.” McCaonughey ad-libbed these words in his first hit, Dazed and Confused, and continues to be inspired by them.—LPK

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**Soul Food**

Staying positive is one thing—getting and staying healthy is another. Take food, for example. Dietitian Beller, nutritionist on WebMD.com, shares tips for the J.K. Livin’ program. She shares her favorite recipes for eating healthy in the following article.

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“Just keep livin’.” McCaonughey ad-libbed these words in his first hit, Dazed and Confused, and continues to be inspired by them.—LPK

McConaughey and fiancée Camila Alves, with their kids, Vida and Levi.

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**Fit First**

The program’s primary focus is fitness, a topic McConaughey knows a thing or two about—among anyone who’s seen tabloid photos of him frolicking on the beach with his Brazilian-model fiancée, Camila Alves, and their son, Levi, 3, and daughter Vida, 2, can tell.

He works with a trainer doing plyometrics, a high-intensity regimen that incorporates powerful movements and explosive exercises. But the actor laughingly admits he’ll do all sorts of activities to stay fit, “whether that’s dancing, hiking, chasing a pig, catching a rooster, or running around following the dog—gone kids and saying, ‘I’m gonna go everywhere they go for an hour and a half.’

We’ve got eight acres [in Austin, where the family is based], so let’s head out and go explore! I find myself up in a tree, down in a gully, you can break a sweat that way too.

While McConaughey consumes loads of fresh vegetables, salads, lean meat, and fish—“I could eat salmon every night of the week.”—he also refuses to obsess about his physical fitness. He says—“I could eat salmon every night of the week.”

Obesity did not increase as drastically among ethnically diverse boys during the last decade. But research done in 2010 by the University of California, San Francisco, and published in Pediatrics shows that black, Hispanic, and Native American girls in fifth, seventh, and ninth grades in California were two to three times more likely to have a high body mass index (BMI) than white girls the same age.

Learning to eat right is important for many reasons, not all of them health-related, says Neumark-Sztainer. Some things are as simple as establishing a healthy breakfast routine, as Beller suggests, can improve a child’s success at school. “Breakfast is linked to a number of positive outcomes, such as lower risk for obesity, but also better academic outcomes,” she says.

J.K. Livin’ participants reflect this academic upswing. According to the foundation’s research, since the program’s launch, 75% of its kids improved academically, in addition, 96% either improved or maintained good behavior at school, and 81% improved attendance.

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