



Prevention

newsletter ...for the health and well-being
of you and your family.

After a summer of sleeping in and doing things on their time, the morning alarm and school bell can be a tough transition for students going back to school.

Whether they dread it or love it, the end of summer can be hectic for your whole family. This newsletter contains some tips to ease the transition.

Back-to-School Basics

First Day Mania

The first day of school tends to be hectic for kids of all ages, adjusting to a new classroom or schedule and trying to remember all the books and supplies they need. Or perhaps your child is transitioning to middle or high school, which is even more stressful for some children. Plus, just the transition from summertime freedom to structured schooldays can be a difficult one. Here are several tips for parents to ease first-day stress for their kids:

- Walk younger students to their classroom and stay with them until they are settled and feel comfortable. Introduce them to their teacher, show them their desk, locker, etc. Leave once they feel at ease.
- Arrange a visit beforehand if your child will be going to a new school. Explore all the areas of the school and get a map to help direct him or her on the first day.
- Pack backpacks the night before so no one is scrambling at the last minute looking for books and supplies. Also, have lunch packed or lunch money ready in advance.
- Make sure you complete any school forms that were mailed to your child over the summer, such as immunization records, permission slips and class schedules – and put in a safe folder for your child to turn in.
- As your child gets older, appearance and what he or she wears on the first day of school becomes very important. To make the morning smoother, pick out clothes the night before. This will help keep everyone on time while getting ready and prevent last-minute rushing in the morning.

Backpack Safety

Backpacks are a popular and practical way for students to carry their books and supplies. When used correctly, the backpack's weight is distributed to some of the body's strongest muscles, and it can be an efficient way to carry the necessities of the school day. However, if backpacks are too heavy or worn incorrectly, they can cause back, neck and shoulder pain, as well as posture problems.

To choose the right backpack, look for the following:

- **Wide, padded shoulder straps.** Narrow straps can dig into shoulders, causing pain and restricting circulation.
- **Two shoulder straps.** Backpacks with only one cannot distribute weight evenly.
- **Padded back.** This protects against sharp edges from objects inside the pack and increases comfort.
- **Waist strap.** It can distribute the weight of a heavy load more evenly.
- **Lightweight.** The backpack itself should not add much weight to the load.
- **Rolling backpack.** This type of backpack may be good for students who must carry heavy loads. Just remember, rolling backpacks must be carried up or down stairs.

To prevent injuries when using a backpack, remind your children of the following guidelines:

- Always use both shoulder straps.
- Tighten the straps so that the pack is close to the body.
- Pack as lightly as possible.
- Organize the backpack so all of its compartments are being used.
- Stop often at your locker and remove any unnecessary books or items.
- Bend down using both knees while the pack is on.

Parents can also help in the following ways:

- Encourage your child or teenager to tell you if he or she is in pain or discomfort because of a heavy load in the backpack.
- Talk to the school about lightening the load and/or be sure the school allows for enough time for your child to stop at his or her locker throughout the day.

Researchers found that the average weight of a child's school backpack was 18 pounds, or 14 percent of his or her body weight. Studies have found that children carrying backpacks exceeding 10 percent of their body weight are more likely to lean forward while walking—potentially increasing their risk of back pain. Talk with your children and make sure they are using their backpacks correctly!

Playground Safety

Each year, over 200,000 preschool and elementary children are injured on the playground, according to the National Program for Playground Safety. Following is a checklist you or your child's school can use for quick reference, so before your child heads out the door for the playground, you can be sure that:

- **Supervision is present.** Many playground injuries are related to inadequate supervision. Adult presence is needed to watch for potential hazards and help keep all the children safe.
- **All children play on age-appropriate equipment.** Preschoolers ages 2 to 5 and children ages 5 to 12 are developmentally different. These two groups should play on separate, age-appropriate equipment.
- **Surfaces are cushioned.** The National Program for Playground Safety found that nearly 70 percent of all playground injuries are related to falls to the ground. Acceptable surfaces include hardwood fiber/mulch, pea gravel, sand and synthetic materials such as rubber mats or tiles. Concrete, asphalt, grass, blacktop and packed dirt or rocks are not recommended.
- **Equipment is safe.** Check to make sure the equipment is anchored safely in the ground, not damaged or broken, S-hooks are entirely closed, bolts are not protruding, there are no exposed footings, etc.

Good Homework and Study Habits

After a long summer, your child may have trouble getting back into the swing of homework. Parents should help children establish healthy study habits as soon as school starts, rather than waiting until they notice problems or until their child's work load becomes overwhelming. The following tips can help you promote good study habits in your children:

- Create an environment that is conducive to doing homework, such as a permanent work space in the child's room or in another part of the home that offers privacy.
- Set a schedule for when homework will be done. Ideally, your child should have a chance to unwind after school or participate in after-school activities, so he or she feels rested before started homework.
- However, make sure after-school activities don't consume the whole evening or get in the way of homework time.
- Establish a household rule that the TV stays off during homework time.
- Be available to answer questions and offer assistance, but never do a child's homework for him or her.
- Find out what works best for your child. Some work better in several short sessions, while some are more productive completing work in one chunk.

It's that time
of year
again—
summer is
over and it's
time for kids
to go back
to school.



- Have your child take a 10-minute break every hour and do something else to alleviate eye, neck and brain fatigue.
- Set up a tutor for your child if he or she is struggling in a particular subject and you aren't able to help enough yourself. Be sure to discuss this option with your child's teacher first.

Other Helpful Suggestions

The following suggestions include important information—such as health conditions and emergency contacts—that need to be shared with your child's school but can sometimes slip through the cracks.

- Give the school an up-to-date list of emergency contacts for before, during and after school hours.
- Give the school nurse and/or principal a list of medications your child is currently taking. If it's a medication the child needs to take during school, be sure it is in the original container and clearly marked (not in an envelope, for instance).
- Report any health problems your child has to the school nurse and/or principal. Allergies are a good example of a health problem the school needs to know about in advance, since there are so many allergies now to food, plants, trees, bee stings or latex.
- Inform the school nurse and/or principal of any physical restrictions your child may possess, such as asthma, and how this may affect his or her physical activity.

Resources Available

The following websites are helpful resources parents can use to make the transition of going back to school easy for everyone.

- American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry: www.aacap.org
- American Academy of Pediatrics: www.aap.org
- KidsHealth: www.kidshealth.org
- National Program for Playground Safety: www.playgroundsafety.org
- American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons: www.orthoinfo.org
- Safe Kids USA: www.usa.safekids.org

For many children and teens the beginning of every school year can be a little bumpy. Change is exciting, but it can be scary, too. However, with your guidance, understanding and patience, your child or teen should have an exciting, successful and rewarding school experience.