

# August 2007 Health Bulletin

Cooperative Extension Service

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It's Time for  
**BACK TO SCHOOL!**



The summer is winding down and it's time to trade those beach balls for backpacks as your child gets ready to go back to school. According to researchers, this can be one of the most stressful times in a parent's life. In fact, it's been documented that September is one month that parents actually lose more hours of sleep than any other time of the year. But, back-to-school time does not have to be the most dreaded time of the year.

Overall, the most important thing you can do to insure that you and your children have a great start to the school year is to establish a routine and stick to it. Whether or not your child is entering school for the first time as a kindergartner or as a seasoned high school student, routines help minimize conflict and stress over issues such as mealtime, bedtime, and social activities. All of these issues affect school performance. You can take an active role in reducing the chaos of the school year.

## Tips for *Smooth Sailing* during the School Year:

- Establish firm household routines.
- Set aside a place in your home for homework only.
  - ✎ Have children complete homework before playtime.
  - ✎ Try to help make homework fun for your child.
  - ✎ Children are more likely to complete homework when an adult is involved.
- Purchase a set of brightly colored file folders for notes sent home from teachers.
- Have kids clean out their backpacks on Sunday night each week in a cardboard box that you decorate together.
- Post important dates and telephone numbers on the fridge.
- Invest in a small recipe or index card box to collect coupons for back-to-school specials on clothes, pens, paper, notebooks, etc.
- Consider developing a contract with your teen that contains rules about dating, extra-curricular activities, use of the family vehicle, and expectations for school nights versus weekend curfews. Be sure to include the consequences that you have negotiated with your teen for violations of the contract.
- Have a back-up for after-school care and a list of competent babysitters from which to choose.
- Get teens to the table for a family meal by allowing them to invite a friend and help plan dinner.



## Is My Child Getting Enough Sleep?

According to the National Center on Sleep Disorders, all children need at least nine hours of sleep each night for their health, safety, and best performance in school. A six year old needs 11 to 12 hours of sleep to function best. But the need for adequate sleep and rest does not end in childhood.

The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) thinks it is so important that they want parents to put **adequate nighttime sleep** on the back-to school list along with pencils, binders and backpacks. Research firmly establishes that sleep is related to brain development. Sleep is actually like food for the brain. Inadequate sleep can lead to:

- attention difficulties
- easy frustration
- difficulty controlling emotions

More tips are available for parents at:



## Quick Back-to-School Checklist

- ✓ Make sure all immunizations are up-to-date for your child/children before they start school.
- ✓ Reduce school absences by making sure you do what you can to prevent illness.
- ✓ Make sure your child/children get enough sleep at night.
- ✓ Assist your child/children with their homework and try to make it *FUN*!
- ✓ Provide healthy snacks for your child to choose from while doing homework.

## Reducing School Absences

Minimize your child's need to miss school by using protective health habits all school year. On average, a child has between 5 and 9 colds a year. This can be reduced by:

- practicing good hygiene such as washing hands frequently
- using disposable tissues
- not sharing utensils

One recommendation from the Mayo Clinic is to teach your child to sneeze or cough in the crook of their elbow instead of covering the mouth with the hand. Germs are spread when we touch our eyes, mouth and noses with our hands.

One of the common reasons for missing school is illness due to asthma and allergies. The number one thing that you can do to minimize an allergy or asthma episode is to reduce your child's exposure to tobacco smoke. This alone can:

- reduce upper respiratory infections
- reduce need for medicine
- improve lung functioning
- reduce the severity of an asthma episode

### Sources:

- American Academy of Pediatrics, <http://www.aap.org/>
- CDC Immunization Schedule, <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/recs/schedules/child-schedule.htm#printable>
- Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, <http://www.aafa.org/>
- CDC National Immunization Program, [www.cdc.gov/vaccines](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines)
- Mayo Clinic, <http://www.mayoclinic.com/index.cfm?>
- National Mental Health and Education Center, <http://www.naspcenter.org/>

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