

Back to School: The Most Wonderful Time of the Year

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After weeks of long hot summer days with sibling spats and cries of “I’m bored,” the sound of a school bell is music to many parent’s ears. Here are some easy tips to help your child start the school year right:

Nutrition

Give your children the best fuel possible. According to Suzannah Olivier, author of *Healthy Food for Happy Kids*, children who skip breakfast or consistently eat cereals high in sugar, do not perform as well in aptitude test, both verbal and nonverbal, when compared to children who eat slow-releasing complex carbohydrates and protein. So, what are healthy breakfast choices? Always include a piece of fruit, some whole grain, and a good source of protein.

Packing lunch for your child gives parents more control over kids’ noontime meals. Encourage your child to choose one-percent or fat-free milk instead of sugar-laden juice drinks. Leave the cheese off sandwiches unless it’s low fat or fat-free. Put vegetables such as lettuce, slices of cucumber, tomato on sandwiches instead of cheese. Remember, processed meats are high in sodium so look for healthy alternatives. Include a serving of fruit in every lunch and include graham crackers, fat-free fig bars, and oatmeal raisin cookies instead of chocolate chip cookies, brownies or cupcakes.

Health and Safety

Arrive alive. Whether a child walks, bikes, drives, or takes the bus to school, they should know how to stay safe near roads and cars. Make sure your child knows to look both ways before crossing a street, to cross street only at crosswalks (preferably ones with a crossing guard) and to avoid accepting rides from unknown persons.

Don’t weigh me down. According to the American Chiropractic Association (ACA), improper use of a heavy backpack can cause chronic back pain, neck pain, and possible nerve injuries. The ACA suggests that a backpack weigh no more than five to ten percent of a child’s total body weight. Also, each child should use both shoulder straps on his/her backpack. To ensure good back health, purchase a backpack with padded, adjustable shoulder strap and a strap that buckles around the waist to help distribute the pack’s weight.

Sleep right. A regular bedtime routine is very important. Avoid action-packed television shows, movies or video games just before bedtime. Also, limit the amount of caffeine in your child’s diet. Caffeine can be found in sodas, chocolates, and some medicines. An excessive sugar habit, especially late at night, can cause sleeplessness.

Keep on movin’. With many schools cutting down on recess and physical education programs, children need more time to “run around” and exercise. Playtime allows children to burn excess energy and exercise their imagination, which helps them focus in school. Healthy parents who raise healthy children create good habits with a lifetime of success!