

PARENT CONNECTION



WHAT'S INSIDE:

- Back-to-school health tips
- Preparing for kindergarten
- Getting the most out of tutoring
- Healthy snack ideas
- School shopping on a budget
- Top baby names of 2024

and more!



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Six back-to-school health tips for parents

A new school year brings with it fresh opportunity, excitement, and, sometimes, anxiety for parents and students. Medical experts say that addressing health-related issues can help make for a stress-free back-to-school season.

"Opening the lines of communication with your child and their physician to talk about nutrition, physical activity, and the steps you can take together to have a healthy and rewarding school year can help ease some of those back-to-school jitters you may be feeling," says Bruce A. Scott, MD, president of the American Medical Association (AMA).

For a healthy and successful school year, follow these doctor-approved tips:

Annual physicals. Visit your child's physician every year. Annual physicals are critical to ensuring children are growing and developing properly.

Talk to your child's pediatrician about vaccines. For the U.S. population in 2019, childhood vaccines prevented more than 24 million illnesses. Vaccines are safe, effective and save lives. Routine childhood immunization is highly effective at preventing disease over a lifetime, reducing the incidence of all targeted diseases, including measles, mumps, rubella, polio



and varicella (chickenpox). And if your child turns 11 or 12 this year, consider the HPV vaccine, which protects against the HPV virus — a virus linked to six types of cancer.

Be conscientious about what your child eats at school. Healthy students are better learners. School meals should include fruits,

vegetables, lean proteins, and whole grains. If you pack your child's lunch and snacks, try to pack at least two-thirds of their meal with plant-based foods. Strive to include lean protein, or plant-based protein, and avoid processed meats and sugary drinks like soda and juice.

Be smart about sunscreen. From gym class and school sports to recess and waiting for the school bus, kids of all ages spend a good portion of their day outside. It's important to take steps to protect your child from damaging UV rays. Look for a broad spectrum sunscreen of at least SPF 30 and apply it before sending your kids to school. And as you're shopping for back-to-school apparel, look for UV protective clothes.

Exercise is key. Children need at least 60 minutes of exercise daily, so check their schedule to make sure they're getting enough physical activity. Strive to build time for bike riding or walking as a family into the end of each day.

Talk to your children about e-cigarettes and other tobacco products. Make your children aware of the dangers of tobacco products and talk to them about how to resist peer pressure. From 2022 to 2023, the number of middle school-aged children using tobacco products overall increased by nearly 50%, with e-cigarettes being the most commonly used product.

With a focus on good health, wellness and nutrition, you can help prepare your child for a healthy and happy school year and a lifetime of good health. [StatePoint]*

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Preparing for kindergarten

Starting kindergarten is a major milestone, one that sets the stage for future learning. Ensuring children are well-equipped to enter kindergarten sets them up for a successful school year in the short term and academic career in the long term.

Kindergarten readiness encompasses a wide range of skills, including academic, social and physical abilities. Yet while many parents think of kindergarten as the formal start of their children's learning, 90% of children's brain development occurs during the first five years of life.

The brain is incredibly receptive during these formative years, making it a critical time for children to receive exposure and guidance in diverse areas. Enrolling them in a quality preschool or pre-K program is one way you can ensure they're creating building blocks for the future, but there are also steps you can take at home.

Try implementing these simple habits into your family's day-to-day routine:

Read to your children daily to build early literacy skills. This is a good habit to begin as early as infancy because it promotes language development, literacy and understanding of others. Make library trips and story times a special treat for toddlers and encourage preschoolers to read to you by describing what is happening in the pictures or making up their own stories. Keep books in the car so you have a fun way to pass the time on long trips or while waiting for appointments.

Schedule playdates for social development. Once babies are able to sit independently, they'll likely enjoy playdates. At this age, playdates should be closely monitored since babies explore with their hands and mouths. At ages 1 and 2, young children tend to engage in parallel play rather than interacting, but organizing small groups of toddlers can continue to promote social development. Older toddlers enjoy more interactive play and begin to learn concepts like sharing.

Practice counting objects to 10 or more together. It's easy to make "math talk" part of your everyday experience in other ways, too. When reading a story, ask children to count the objects on each page. When eating, encourage math connections by having children count the items on their plates. Children can also



explore math through common toys and games, like shape sorters, knob puzzles and nesting cups for infants and toddlers; and large puzzles, sand or water tables and card games for preschoolers.

Encourage physical activities like playing on the playground. Play isn't just for entertainment; it's a building block for healthy growth. It helps children learn from the world around them and develop traits like generosity and honesty. Because it helps children release their full range of emotions and has therapeutic benefits, play also has positive effects on mental health. In addition to supporting their social-emotional well-being, children learn to navigate the world and practice motor skills while at play.

Establish routines at home. A structured school day is filled with routines that provide familiarity and comfort. Routines can serve similar benefits at home by helping children clearly understand what is expected of them and when. A morning routine makes it easy to check the boxes as you prepare for the day and work to get out the door on time. An evening routine helps everyone settle down and prepare for a good night's sleep.

Encourage self-regulation and social skills. Self-regulation is the ability to understand and manage your own behavior and reactions, often displayed during actions like taking turns, transitioning from one activity to another or cleaning up for dinner. Social skills include interaction and communication abilities like speech, body language and facial expressions, as well as the ability to play with others and make friends. As a parent, you can model these skills and play games that involve taking turns and cooperation. Playdates also help facilitate positive social experiences for children. [Family Features]*



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How students can get the most out of tutoring

No student's academic career is free from challenges. Classroom challenges can help students get more out of their coursework, which can benefit them as their academic careers progress and prepare them to excel in the professional arena.

Students can sometimes overcome challenges on their own or with a little extra assistance from educators and parents. When coursework is especially challenging, students may benefit from working with tutors. Direct one-on-one communication with a tutor can help students fully understand complex concepts that parents may not understand. In certain instances, educators cannot always pause lessons to help struggling students in the classroom, particularly if others in the class are ready to move on. So tutors may be just what students need to unlock their academic potential and stay the course as their knowledge of a specific subject expands.

The partnership between student and tutor is most effective when each person fully commits to a tutoring session. Professional tutors are paid to be committed, and it's up to students to match that commitment. Making the most of working with a tutor comes down to preparation, interest, a



willingness to put in the work, and a host of additional factors.

Prepare for each tutoring session. Students should prepare for each tutoring session just like they do for other activities they care about, including extracurriculars. Student musicians would not arrive to a recital without their instrument, nor would athletes arrive for a game without their equipment. Prior to the beginning of a tutoring session,

double-check to ensure you have all the necessary materials, including books, class notes, past and current assignments, and a syllabus for the class. If possible, send the tutor the syllabus in advance of the first session, and note the challenges you're having in regard to the material.

Recognize the student-tutor dynamic is a two-way street. Tutors should not be the only ones to speak during a session.

Students can prepare questions prior to each session and then ask any additional questions that come to mind during the session. Open, free-flowing communication can help students gain a stronger grasp of the material, and it's the responsibility of both tutors and students to keep lines of communication open. If a tutor's approach is not resonating, speak up and ask for more clarification.

Actively engage. Tutors may give some additional work to help students learn the material. Students should not write off such assignments because they won't be graded. Active engagement in tutoring, both during sessions and between them, can ensure students get the most out of tutoring.

Be patient. Tutors are typically utilized when students have trouble understanding complex subjects. That complexity means it will likely take time before students fully grasp what tutors are teaching them. Students should stay patient and not grow discouraged if it's taking awhile to grasp material. Celebrate any progress that is made, however incremental it may be. Small steps forward can lead students down a successful path that could ultimately end with mastery of a complex subject. [Metro Creative Connection]*



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Top baby names for 2024

Olivia is once again the most common girl name in the United States while Noah overtakes Liam for the most common boys name. The rankings below are based on the most recent data on birth from BabyCenter.com.



Boy names:

1. Noah
2. Liam
3. Oliver
4. Elijah
5. Mateo
6. Lucas
7. Levi
8. Ezra
9. Asher
10. Leo
11. James
12. Luca
13. Henry
14. Ethan
15. Muhammad
16. Hudson
17. Maverick
18. Elias
19. Daniel
20. Theodore
21. Benjamin

22. Michael
23. Grayson
24. Sebastian
25. Jack
26. Kai
27. Gabriel
28. Theo
29. Wyatt
30. Alexander

Girl names:

1. Olivia
2. Amelia
3. Emma
4. Sophia
5. Charlotte
6. Isabella
7. Ava
8. Mia
9. Luna
10. Ellie
11. Harper

12. Aurora
13. Evelyn
14. Eliana
15. Aria
16. Nova
17. Lily
18. Camila
19. Violet
20. Gianna
21. Sofia
22. Mila
23. Hazel
24. Scarlett
25. Layla
26. Ella
27. Ivy
28. Willow
29. Chloe
30. Eleanor



Make protecting your child's eye health a priority

Annual checkups are an important step in protecting your child's eye health and vision, but families tend to see the eye doctor less regularly than their primary care doctor, pediatrician or dentist.

This year, ZEISS Vision Care commissioned a study that found only 47% of parents reported taking their children to an optometrist annually, but 78% saw their primary care doctor each year and 71% made a trip to the dentist. The study also revealed 82% of parents with kids ages 18 and younger are concerned about their children experiencing digital eyestrain from using electronics.

Parents in the survey reported a variety of behaviors to protect their children's eyes, including screen time breaks and using glasses, including those with blue light and ultraviolet (UV) ray blocking features.

Learn how you can protect your child's eye health with these tips.

Don't wait for your child to complain about fuzzy vision. Kids' eye muscles are adaptable, making it possible for them to have functional vision even when they need a high degree of refractive correction for nearsightedness or farsightedness. Often, kids don't realize better vision is even possible until they have a thorough exam.

Watch for signs of poor vision. Although your child may not directly complain about having trouble seeing,

you may notice symptoms that don't necessarily equate to vision. Headaches and burning causing itching and rubbing the eyes are symptoms that may be attributed to allergies or other causes. Dry eyes and tearing are also symptoms of vision strain. You might find your child squinting or holding objects close or farther away. Sometimes a lack of interest in reading or difficulty concentrating are also related to vision.

Look for kid-friendly corrective eyewear. The shape of the face, distance between the eyes and other proportions gradually change as children develop, which influences the position of eyeglass lenses. In addition, the pupil diameter increases in children and young people while it shrinks again in adults. This means lenses designed for adults aren't necessarily well-suited for children.

Protect eyes from potential risks. Require kids to wear protective eyewear when participating in activities, like certain sports, that could harm their eyes. Sunglasses make it easier to see in bright sunlight, but they also protect the eyes from harmful UV rays.

Schedule annual exams. Checking in with your child's eye doctor each year is essential for protecting eye health and vision. If your child wears glasses, verifying his or her prescription is still appropriate is important. If not, it's still a good idea to monitor for changes. [Family Features]*

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8 healthy snack ideas your kids will love

Parents know that growing children need a lot of food.

According to pediatric dietitian Hanna Leikin, MS, RD, CSP, LD, kids need a higher calorie demand per body weight compared to adults to support bone development, muscle growth and other bodily functions. Perhaps that's why it seems like a stocked refrigerator or pantry can become barren in just a few days when kids are in the house.

Children are frequently looking for snacks after school and between meals, which means that parents need to have a variety of snack foods at the ready for their youngsters. But it can be a struggle to find healthy snacks children will eat. With that in mind, parents can consider these eight healthy alternatives to less nutritional fare like chips or sugary treats.

Fruit on a stick: It seems any food enjoyed on a stick is fun to eat, like rainbow fruit skewers. Simply slide a variety of chopped or sliced fruit onto the skewers and make a healthy, colorful snack. For an added bonus, include a small cup of low-fat vanilla yogurt for a fruit dip. For younger children, serve the fruit on a popsicle stick or pretzel stick.

Baby carrots and hummus: Who can resist baby carrots? After all, they seem tailor-made for kids' small fingers. Pair with a homemade or store-bought hummus, which is full of protein and fiber. You can even find dessert hummus, which may prove particularly appealing to children's palates.

Crackers and cheese: Choose whole-grain crackers and a low-fat cheese. This provides the crunch of chips without the fat and calories. In addition, cheese adds protein and the benefits of calcium and other nutrients found in dairy.

Nut butters and pretzels: Kids need unsaturated fats to spur brain growth and overall development. Nuts and nut butters offer these good fats. The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases says peanut butter can be given to kids as young as four months old, and that early exposure may prevent peanut allergies. Let kids dip pretzels into the nut butter for a filling snack.

Overnight oats creations: Let kids take part in building jars or containers of overnight oats with their favorite ingredients. When old fashioned rolled oats are mixed with low-fat milk (or dairy alternatives), raisins, granola, fresh fruit,

chia seeds, and even low-fat yogurt and left to sit overnight, the result is a spoonable treat that's ideal for meals and snacks. Plus the fiber in oatmeal will help keep children feeling fuller longer.

Frozen smoothie bowl: This is a great alternative to ice cream. Simply blend your child's favorite frozen fruits (and toss in a few veggies) with low-fat Greek yogurt. Serve in a bowl with toppings like granola, finely chopped nuts or coconut flakes.

Energy balls or bars: Mix dates, nuts, seeds, and rolled oats and press into bar shapes or roll into bite-sized balls when kids need a sweet and energizing snack.

Turkey and cheese roll-ups: Ensure that kids are getting enough protein by offering a lean protein source like sliced turkey. Roll up a slice of turkey or sliced chicken breast around a cheese stick for a portable and fun snack.

Healthy snacks for children are easier to dream up than one may think. It can take children several times of seeing a new food on his or her plate before being inclined to try it, so parents should stay the course with healthy snacks even if kids are initially reluctant to try them. [MetroCreativeConnection]*



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Calm first-day-of-school jitters

Starting school for the first time or simply returning to campus after another summer break can lead to mixed feelings. Kids may be excited to see their friends every day, but that comes at the price of the end of lazy summer days.

The first day of school is on the horizon, and parents may discover their children seem a bit despondent that vacation is coming to a close. Such feelings may stem from more than the end of summer vacation. Some students may be nervous about going to school. New faces, new experiences and new teachers can lead to a little anxiety. Here are some ways to tame the nerves.

Do a trial run. Before school starts, do a test run to the drop-off location, bus stop or pick up whomever will be carpooling together. Getting into that routine can help reduce nervousness.

Participate in meet-and-greets. Some schools offer certain events designed to introduce students even before classes begin. Schools may host ice cream socials or picnic lunches on school grounds, particularly for younger grades. These events give children an opportunity to get to know their classmates before the first school bell rings.

Take a school tour. If a student is about to start in a new school or will be attending school for the first time, families will want



to see if they can get tours of the school and facilities. Just one glance inside can be enough to familiarize students with the lay of the land, which might make things less scary on the first day.

Practice conversation skills. Many modern kids have their eyes locked on devices. They may be a little rusty with ice breakers and initiating conversation. Role playing at home can give kids some ideas of how to forge new relationships in the classroom.

Recognize and take concerns seriously. Parents and other caregivers can be receptive to conversation with children regarding their concerns about starting school. Talking about feelings can help kids tame their nervousness, especially when adults take them seriously.

Children may be nervous about starting school. Parents, caregivers and teachers can work together to help students overcome these jitters quickly. [MetroCreativeConnection]*

Back-to-school shopping tips to stretch your budget

This fall, U.S. families will do the bulk of their back-to-school shopping in brick-and-mortar stores, according to new research highlighting what's important to shoppers this season, and offering insights into how to secure all the items on your checklist while beating the crowds.

The 2024 U.S. Back-to-School Consumer Sentiment Survey from Sensormatic Solutions reveals that 74% of consumers plan to conduct their back-to-school shopping in-store, with some who started as early as June. However, due to the state of the U.S. economy, 34% plan to spend significantly less than in previous years.

"As retailers aim to increase value for shoppers with great deals, inventory management and larger crowds will also be a key focus this season. With that in mind, shoppers should also do their part to plan ahead to ensure they secure everything on their shopping list," said Christa Anz, global marketing leader at Sensormatic Solutions.

Here are some shopping tips to help you stretch your budget and enjoy a seamless season:

Make a plan: Though 18% of consumers said they intended to start shopping in June (up from 11% in 2023), August is still predicted to be the busiest month for back-to-school shopping. If you want to take advantage of deals without facing respondents' top anticipated shopping challenges — out-of-stock items (56%), large crowds (39%) and lack of time to shop (35%) — create a plan. Compile a list of what you need and evaluate store deals before shopping.

Make time: Retail theft and crime are growing concerns for shoppers and retailers alike, with 44% of shoppers noting that being safe and comfortable is a top consideration when choosing where to shop this summer. As a result, many stores have implemented new technologies to secure products and keep people safe. Although most technologies won't impact your shopping experience, it's helpful to still consider adding some time in your schedule to account for potential security measures, such as locked items, that may require associate assistance to access.

Save money: Price is a crucial factor when shopping in-store for 75% of respondents. To stretch their dollars, 2024 back-to-school shoppers say they are considering reusing supplies from prior years or shopping at discount or secondhand stores. However, using options like "buy online, pick up in-store" (BOPIS) is also a good strategy if you're looking to control spending. It can help you prioritize specific items, avoid impulse purchases and forego shipping fees while still shopping at your favorite stores.

Shop sustainably: If you're one of the 83% of shoppers for whom sustainability will play a role in your back-to-school purchasing decisions, you can adopt many shopping strategies to reduce your impact on the environment. Some shoppers say they plan to purchase clothes and supplies from secondhand stores, but changing your retailer choices is not always an option. You may also consider choosing products with sustainable packaging (41%) and opting for items made with eco-friendly materials like recycled paper and biodegradable pens (38%). [StatePoint]*