

Use Summer Break to Take Care of Your Kids' Whole Health

June 04, 2019 | AdventHealth



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When you're a parent of school-aged children, your focus most of the year is on their education: getting them to and from school, helping with homework, shuttling them to extra-curricular activities and getting through the bedtime routine.

Summer Break can ease those responsibilities and allow you free time to focus more fully on your child's physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. Know how to support them over the summer

Protect Their Physical Wellbeing

A healthy body leads to a healthy mind and spirit. Take the time now to ensure your children are in the best physical health possible for the upcoming school year.

Schedule All Needed Medical Checkups

With a more flexible schedule, summer is the perfect time to catch up on those routine checkups that you may have put off during the school year. Though, you should keep in mind that other parents will be doing the same. Call early in the summer to get your needed appointments on the books, such as:

- Annual well visits
- School physicals
- Sports physicals
- Vaccinations

Stick to a Kid-Healthy Diet

Keeping kids physically healthy is more than just a trip to the pediatrician — and ensuring their healthy diet can be a great place to start. After all, teaching them to eat healthy now puts them on the right track for being healthy adults.

Kids (and grownups, too) should learn to balance their food choices including what they drink. It's best to choose a variety of foods from the four food groups and to pay attention to portion size and nutritional value. Help them choose foods and drinks low in added sugars, foods with less sodium, less saturated fats and limit sweets. Help them consider these healthy choices:

- Dairy (milk, cheese and yogurt)
- Grain (make at least ½ whole grains)
- Proteins (poultry, fish, seafood, lean meat, soy foods, nuts, seeds and beans)
- Vegetables (from all five sub-groups)
- Whole fruits (without sugary juices)

Also remember that kids require a ton of energy. Steering them towards kid-friendly proteins will help fuel their bodies and brains.

Allow Lots of Physical Activity

Keeping kids physically active with activities such as swimming, hiking, biking, skating and sports is good for their physical and mental wellbeing. Allow plenty of free time for outdoor play and participate when you can. If there isn't an opportunity to connect to other kids during the day, encourage a team sport or arrange play dates with friends as often as possible.

Ensure Their Safety

Remember, with all the summer fun comes an increased responsibility of keeping our little ones safe and sound. Water play presents an obvious danger, and the summer sun can reach harmful or even deadly temperatures.

Water Safety Tips:

- Always have adult supervision when children are in and around water
- Don't rely on pool floats or arm floats to protect your children
- Install pool alarms
- Install secure fencing with locking gate around home pools
- Keep house doors near pools locked to prevent children from getting out of the home undetected
- Learn cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) – it could save a life
- Store pool ladders away from above ground pools when not in use
- Teach kids to swim to help protect against drowning

Sun Safety Tips:

- Avoid outdoor activities during the hottest part of the day, usually 11:00 am to 2:00 pm
- Get immediate medical attention if you suspect your child is suffering a heat-related illness
- Infants and children should wear loose-fitting, light-colored, lightweight clothing
- Keep plenty of cold water handy to keep kids hydrated
- Never leave infants or children in a parked car even if windows are cracked open
- Use showers or baths to keep cool
- Use sunscreen of at least 15 SPF with UVA and UVB protection
- Use swimsuits made with sun protective fabric, and use a cover up when not in the water

Keep Them Mentally Stimulated

Keep your children's minds sharp and active during the summer by planning activities that stimulate brain function. Plan scavenger hunts using maps they must follow and hints they must solve to find the hidden items, read books, print off worksheets or take them to a museum or zoo and talk about what they're seeing or experiencing.

Nurture Their Spiritual Well-Being

Take care of your children's mental and spiritual health too. Summer is great time to focus on what's important to your child.

Insist on Quiet Time

Don't overload them with activities. Kids can suffer from stress just as adults do so it is important to allow your kids to have downtime.

Encourage Reading

Reading for pleasure is relaxing, calming and allows you to escape to another time and place. Reading has the added benefit of increasing your child's vocabulary and expanding their view of the world.

Create a Healthy Sleep Environment

Getting enough sleep allows your child's body to repair and restore itself physically and mentally. Recommended hours of sleep per day by age:

- Children ages 3 – 5: 11 to 14 hours per 24 hours
- Children ages 6 – 12: 9 to 12 hours per 24 hours
- Children ages 13 – 18: 8 to 10 hours per 24 hours

Support Spiritual Growth

Send your kids to vacation bible school, a children's church retreat or summer camp. Spending time with fellow youth members from church is a great way to strengthen their walk with Christ in a safe and relaxing environment.

We're Here for You

Talk with your pediatrician about additional ways you can support your child's whole health this summer. Give us a call or go online to [schedule an appointment](#) to get those routine health checks and physicals crossed off your list so that you have plenty of time to feel whole as a family when the school year starts.

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