Is Your Teen Too Thin?
Learn the Facts Behind Eating Disorders

Help Your Child Tackle Football Safety

Meet the Teacher:
How to Prepare for Parent-Teacher Conferences

Check out our healthy living tips in the Child Health Library at www.childrensmercy.org.
Weighing Flu Shot Options

Flu season is on its way, and now is the time to prepare your family with their annual flu vaccinations.

In addition to the fever, fatigue and body aches that come with the flu, it also can cause severe health complications in young children, the elderly and people with poor immunity. New flu vaccination guidelines are now stressing the need for children of all ages to be vaccinated.

Previously, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended that children from 6 months to 5 years of age be vaccinated against influenza. This year, the CDC recommends children ages 6 months to 18 years receive vaccinations against the flu virus.

An Alternative Method

“Sometimes it can be difficult to get kids to the pediatrician for shots,” says Denise Bratcher, DO, Infectious Disease at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics and Professor of Pediatrics at the UMKC School of Medicine. “Fortunately, there is a nasal spray vaccine that can be administered to healthy people ages 2 to 49, so their fear of needles is not an obstacle.”

Immunizing children can prevent them from getting sick and missing days at school, which also alleviates the issue of parents missing work to care for their children.

For more information on the flu, visit our Child Health Library at www.childrensmercy.org/childhealth and search for “flu.”

Have a Happy, Healthy Halloween

Costumes and candy lining store walls can only mean one thing—Halloween is here!

While Halloween is a fun holiday, mountains of candy aren’t good for anyone. With the nation’s childhood obesity rate at a shocking 32 percent, it’s more important than ever to ensure your child is eating a balanced, nutritious diet.

“Candy on one day is not a huge concern. It’s when we indulge in it for weeks or months that it becomes a problem,” says Shelly Summar, Weight Management Coordinator at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics. “For this reason, it’s important for parents to not let Halloween treats last too long and even consider giving out items other than candy.”

Get Creative

Summar suggests these alternative treats:

- nonfood items, such as crayons, pencils, stickers, fake tattoos, rubber balls, wax lips, glow sticks and rubber spiders
- sugar-free treats like sugar-free gum, string cheese, hot cocoa packets or popcorn
- coins including pennies, nickels and dimes

“It’s okay for parents to think outside the box and be different than everyone else on the street,” says Summar. “Halloween can be fun and healthy. Someone’s got to start the trend, and it might as well be you.”

Learn more about having a safe and healthy Halloween by visiting the Seasonal Spotlight section of our Child Health Library at www.childrensmercy.org/childhealth.
Parent-teacher conferences can be approached with dread or joy by both parents and children. Parents are reminded of their own school days when they see the blackboards and small desks. They also bring to the conferences their hopes and fears about their children, which may be challenged or confirmed. Meanwhile, children wonder what will be said about them.

“Parent-teacher conferences allow parents to help with the education process,” says Kitty Hannan, a teacher for the public school at Children’s Mercy Hospital. “They learn what they can do specifically for their child.”

Parents have homework to do before attending a parent-teacher conference. Following these tips can help you make the most of your time with your child’s teacher.

Be Prepared
- Start from the beginning of the school year. When you build a relationship with your child’s teacher through regular contact, you are more likely to know how your child is doing in school.
- Be prepared to discuss your child’s strengths, weaknesses, likes, dislikes and learning style, as well as any concerns you have.
- Speak with your child. What does he want you to ask? Write down his suggestions as well as your own questions.
- Bring paper and pen.
- Be open to what the teacher says. If you disagree with the teacher, state this respectfully and say that you want to cooperate to come to a resolution.
- Discuss the conference with your child, maintaining a positive tone.
- Follow through on any resolutions made at the conference.
- Remember that parents and teachers see children in different settings. Your experiences with your child are different from those of his or her teacher.

Ask Questions
- How is work evaluated in the classroom?
- What expectations do you have for my child?
- May I see examples of my child’s work?
- Are homework assignments and grades available on the Web?
- Describe a typical interaction my child has had with another child.

Your Child: To Bring or Not to Bring?
Some parents want to bring their child to the conference, but Hannan says this does not help. Having the child there does not allow parents or teachers to speak freely. However, when parents and teachers work together, they can help children reach their maximum potential.

“The parent-teacher conference is a good opportunity to share information back and forth between the parent and the teacher. The children who are most successful in school have a strong parental involvement.”

—Laurie Oswald, a teacher for the public school at Children’s Mercy Hospital
It may surprise you to learn that you and your child aren’t alone when it comes to such conduct. According to the 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBSS), nearly half of all high school students in the greater Kansas City area were actively trying to lose weight. However, only about 15 percent of these students were considered overweight, and as many as 7 percent of students in the area reported using diet pills in the past month—a disturbingly high number considering many of these products aren’t approved by the Food and Drug Administration.

“Experts disagree on exactly how common eating disorders are, but estimates range from between 1 and 5 percent of the adolescent population,” says Michael Spaulding-Barclay, MD, MS, Director of the Eating Disorders Center at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at the UMKC School of Medicine. “There is no singular cause for eating disorders, though research points to genetic links, as well as a variety of other factors. In short, each eating disorder is unique and has to be treated individually.”

Learn the Facts

Simply put, adolescents suffering from anorexia nervosa will greatly restrict the amount of food they eat, taking in many fewer calories than is healthy. Patients suffering from bulimia nervosa will binge—meaning they will eat large amounts of food—and purge—or rid the body of the food eaten—through intense exercise, laxatives or self-induced vomiting.

Children and adolescents who engage in “disordered eating” do not have what would be traditionally termed an eating disorder, but they may still have serious medical problems. If the condition negatively impacts a child’s medical or mental health, schoolwork, social life or family relationships, it is time to seek help.

Your 15-year-old daughter just got home, and it’s an hour or two before you’ll have dinner ready, so you offer her a snack. Her response? “I can’t, mom. Don’t you know that a medium-sized banana has 105 calories? Besides, I didn’t even have time to make it to the gym after school today.” You’ve also noticed changes in her behavior lately. Why is she acting this way?
While no one ‘causes’ a child to develop an eating disorder, constantly hearing parents and other trusted adults commenting negatively about their bodies can impact the way children view themselves,” says Dr. Spaulding-Barclay.

“A child who grows up in a home where parents eat healthfully, avoid fad diets and enjoy regular physical activity is more apt to engage in those good habits—and develop a positive self-image.”

How can you set the example for your child? Remember to eat healthfully and exercise for the right reasons. Also, be careful when talking about your own body. Instead of complaining about something physical, why not praise good character traits? Feeling good about yourself can help your child have a healthy, positive self-image, too.

Disordered eating is often a slippery slope,” says Dr. Spaulding-Barclay. “Adolescents with disordered eating problems often have incredibly rigid routines such as refusing to eat foods containing fat or exercising two or three hours daily. These adolescents can benefit from treatment despite not meeting the full criteria for an eating disorder.”

If you feel your teen may have an eating disorder, call the Children’s Mercy Teen Clinic at (816) 234-3050.

Getting Help
One of the best ways parents can be vigilant in protecting children against eating disorders is to watch for behavioral changes. For instance, if your child completely stops eating sweets, suddenly becomes vegetarian or vegan for no known reason or exercises hours a day, you may want to be concerned.

“I always encourage parents to trust their instincts,” says Dr. Spaulding-Barclay. “Any time a parent is concerned, it’s best to talk to a primary care provider, or a specialist in eating disorders, such as an Adolescent Medicine specialist, psychiatrist, psychologist or dietitian—someone who can accurately evaluate for eating disorders.”

There is no single cause of eating disorders. A variety of factors, including genetics, social pressures and self-esteem, can influence whether or not a child develops anorexia nervosa- or bulimia nervosa-like conditions.
The Holidays
It’s Not All About Gifts

For many families, holidays have become more about the gifts and less about time spent together. Here are some tips for making your family’s holiday season meaningful and fulfilling.

- **Build and keep traditions.** Focusing on traditions, such as baking holiday cookies or going caroling, can help put meaning back into the holiday season. It’s never too late to establish traditions by planning holiday activities you can enjoy each year.

- **Help someone in need.** Volunteering as a family offers an opportunity to teach kids that one person can truly make a difference in another person’s life.

- **Choose gifts with meaning.** Sure, sometimes your nephew demands a certain new toy. But in general, putting more thought into selecting a gift—or even making one—brings good spirits to the giver and the recipient. Whatever you choose to do, do it as a family. “The most important way to teach children anything is to model the behavior to them,” says Edward Christophersen, PhD, clinical psychologist at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics and Professor of Pediatrics at the UMKC School of Medicine. “By joining together as a family in meaningful holiday activities, you are instilling lifelong lessons in your children.”

For more tips on holiday cheer and safety, visit our Child Health Library at www.childrensmercy.org/childhealth.

Gearing Up for Football Season

Each year, more than 150,000 youth football players are treated for injuries in hospital emergency rooms across the country. How can you make sure your teen doesn’t become part of this statistic?

The first step, according to Kevin Latz, MD, Orthopaedic Surgery at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics and Assistant Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery at the UMKC School of Medicine, is working with teams’ coaches and trainers to guarantee proper tackling and blocking techniques are emphasized.

“Knowing how to tackle correctly is very important in football, where blows to the head are unfortunately common,” says Dr. Latz. “Players should be aware of the symptoms of concussion, including nausea, confusion and headache. Because recent studies have shown that a young athlete’s brain recovers more slowly and less fully than older athletes, returning to play with these symptoms can be very dangerous.”

In addition to emphasizing proper tackling techniques, ensure that proper headgear and equipment—those that fit your son well—are utilized.

Also, your teen should:

- **drink plenty of water before, during and after games and practice**
- **have a physical exam before practice season begins**
- **never play through pain**
- **warm up and stretch before physical activity**

Huddle up at www.childrensmercy.org/sportsandfitness for more tips on keeping your child healthy and safe while playing sports.
Small Incisions, Big Benefits

At Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics, our physicians are among the top in the nation in performing various pediatric minimally invasive surgeries, resulting in maximum benefits for your child.

Compared to traditional “open” operations, minimally invasive surgeries are able to reduce a child’s hospital stay, decrease her pain and allow a quicker return to routine activities.

“There is a cosmetic benefit with a minimally invasive approach as well,” says George W. Holcomb III, MD, MBA, Surgeon-In-Chief, Director of the Center for Minimally Invasive Surgery at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics and Professor of Surgery at the UMKC School of Medicine. “These surgeries are performed with several tiny incisions, preventing your child from having a large scar after surgery.”

Leading-Edge Procedures

A number of minimally invasive operations are performed frequently at Children’s Mercy including appendectomy, fundoplication, pyloromyotomy, cholescyctectomy and splenectomy. Fundoplication—an operative correction for infants and children who need surgery for gastroesophageal reflex disease—is one of the more common minimally invasive surgeries performed at Children’s Mercy. This procedure is often used if a child does not respond to management through diet and medication. Appendectomy, which is the removal of the appendix due to appendicitis, is another common minimally invasive surgery.

“Children’s Mercy is able to provide leading-edge technology in the surgical care of children and infants,” says Dr. Holcomb. “We are one of the leading centers in the country using this type of surgery, which holds a great deal of benefits for infants and children. We perform a large number of minimally invasive surgeries each year and have had extremely good results.”

Need a physician? Visit www.childrensmercy.org and click on “Find a Doctor.”

A Reason to Quit

When it comes to cigarette smoking, quitting can be difficult. With an estimated 50,000 deaths from secondhand smoke each year, according to a 2006 U.S. Surgeon General report, giving up the habit can be an easy decision that protects you and your children.

Since children’s lungs and respiratory systems are still developing, they are at a greater risk of being affected by secondhand smoke. It can lead to pneumonia, asthma, bronchitis, middle ear infections and can even be a contributing cause to cancer later in life.

November 20 is the 2008 Great American Smokeout, an annual event sponsored by the American Cancer Society that targets a date for smokers to quit, at least for one day and hopefully forever. If you are a smoker, join others and put down the tobacco for good.
REASON #23

PEDiatric SPECIALISTS
CLOSE TO HOME

This fall, we’re proud to celebrate the fifth anniversary of Children’s Mercy Northland. With pediatric urgent care services and more than a dozen pediatric specialty clinics, Children’s Mercy Northland brings the nationally recognized expertise of our pediatric specialists closer to Northland families. Wherever you live in the metro area, we could give you a million reasons to choose Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics. But all you need is one. When it’s your child, it has to be Children’s Mercy.

Find out more about the pediatric specialists close to you at www.childrensmercy.org.

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