Health and Safety News from the Pediatric Experts at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics

Welcome to our special back-to-school issue of Safe & Sound!

Let the Games Begin! Bring Back Family Night

Help Your Kids Reach Out and Read

3 Tips to Make Homework Easier

Check out our healthy living tips in the Child Health Library at www.childrensmercy.org.
Take the Work Out of Homework

After spending more than seven hours sitting in a classroom, the last thing your child wants to do when he gets home is pull out his schoolbooks. What can you do to help make homework less work?

Even though homework can vary from night to night and school to school, a little structure can help make a large homework load a little more manageable. The following tips can help your child maximize his time while still getting the most out of each lesson.

- **Get organized.** Whether assigned 20 minutes or one hour of homework, your child may have difficulty knowing where to begin. To get started, help your child create a homework plan, such as writing a list and numbering the assignments from highest to lowest importance and estimating how long each assignment will take.

- **Create a homework area.** The environment also can play a vital role in easing your child’s stress while working on assignments. Create a place where your child can concentrate and not be easily distracted, such as at the dining room table or a quiet place in the den.

- **Work and play.** The attention span of your child can only last so long. Therefore, allow him to take 15-minute breaks every hour to stretch and refresh.

   For more ways to get a handle on homework, visit the Child Health Library at www.childrensmercy.org and search “homework.”

A Peek at Pica

Has your young child ever eaten dirt or sand? It’s practically a childhood rite of passage to eat at least one unusual item, but if your little one makes a habit of it, she may have pica.

**Pica** is a pattern of eating non-food items, and according to the National Institutes of Health, between 10 and 32 percent of children ages 1 to 6 develop pica. Children with autism and other brain-behavior disorders are more likely to develop pica, but it also can be indicative of poor nutrition.

“If a child exhibits pica after age 2, parents should mention it to their pediatrician,” says Chitra Dinakar, MD, Allergy, Asthma and Immunology at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics and Associate Professor of Pediatrics at the UMKC School of Medicine. “Evaluation and treatment depend on the substance ingested and symptoms exhibited by the child.”

Common items ingested include:
- chalk
- clay
- dirt
- paint chips
- paper

Pica can lead to gastrointestinal disorders, infections, mouth injuries or lead poisoning, depending on the items ingested. If your child has eaten something that could be potentially toxic, call Poison Control at (800) 222-1222.

Treatment for pica varies according to the root cause of the disorder. Treatment may include correcting nutritional deficiencies, behavioral therapy or medication. In many cases, pica is a temporary disorder that disappears as the child gets older.

To learn more about childhood nutrition, visit the Child Health Library at www.childrensmercy.org.
Recess to the Rescue

Recess. Many children will tell you it is their favorite subject in school, but before you begin worrying about your child’s academic interests, you should know that regular play may mean an improvement in schoolwork and better behavior in class.

A recent study of more than 11,000 third graders suggests that a daily recess break of 15 minutes or more may improve a child’s learning, social development and health.

“Many studies show that children with the highest fitness levels also score the highest on standardized tests,” says Farrell Weiers, PhD, a former school psychologist who is now a psychology fellow at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics. “Memory skills are maximized when the learning process is broken up during the day.”

Play As Socialization

Unstructured play each school day not only keeps children physically healthy, but also allows them to develop and utilize important social and emotional behaviors.

“Sharing, taking turns, cooperating—these are all vital social skills a child needs to learn,” says Dr. Weiers. “All of these come into play at recess, and in this way, a child’s playtime is a strong socializing agent.”

Many schools are removing the daily recess period for children in order to focus more time and energy on science and mathematics, which minimizes their voluntary socialization.

“Parents with children whose schools do not provide recess need to be aware of the social implications of that decision,” says Dr. Weiers. “Interaction with peers is vital for a child’s social development.”

Alertness in Class

Spending time outside playing can also have an effect on a child’s alertness. Children who spend at least one hour outside each day are less likely to become tired than those who do not.

“Sunlight temporarily blocks the production of melatonin, which makes children drowsy,” says Dr. Weiers. “Recess provides the physical and mental stimulation a child needs to continue learning throughout the day.”

Visit www.childrensmercy.org/backtoschool to help get your child ready for the new school year.

Play It Safe

“Each year in the emergency room, we see children who have been hurt on the playground,” says Denise Dowd, MD, MPH, Director of Research for the Division of Emergency Medicine at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics and Professor of Pediatrics at the UMKC School of Medicine. “What makes this especially sad is that most of these injuries are preventable.”

Improper playground surfaces are among the leading causes of playground injuries. Here are a few things to look for in a safe playground surface:

- The playground surface should be free of standing water, rocks, roots or other debris that could cause a child to fall.
- Surfaces should be filled with soft materials, such as wood chips, pea gravel, sand or shredded rubber.
- Cushioned surfaces should extend at least six feet past the playground equipment.

Keep in mind that no surface can prevent all injuries from occurring, and adult supervision is essential for keeping children safe at play.
Learning to read does not begin once a child attends his first day of school. Literacy development starts at infancy and constantly progresses as children determine the meaning of symbols found in their world.

Reading Readiness

It is never too early to begin nurturing reading skills in children to help them develop a lifelong love of reading. Parents can begin cultivating language and communication development as early as the nursery. Reading to infants is important because they are constantly attaching meaning to people and objects.

"With continuing support and encouragement from a health care provider who can determine developmental levels, parents can be very proactive in their child’s road to reading," says Sharon Wilkerson, MD, FAAP, Medical Director of Reach Out and Read at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at the UMKC School of Medicine. "Speaking, singing and sharing books with babies are the easiest ways for parents and caregivers to cultivate emerging literacy."

In early childhood development, there are countless theories on the most appropriate techniques for strengthening early learning skills, and the health care professionals at Children’s Mercy are able to work with parents and caregivers to provide the best options.

The Learning Center

Located on the ground floor of Sutherland Tower at Children’s Mercy Hospital, the Kreamer Family Resource Center has been offering patients,

What You Can Do

The best way for your children to get a head start in the world of books is by reading aloud to them. Here are some tips to make the most of your story times:

- **Read and re-read.** If you’ve just opened your child’s favorite book for the hundredth time, take heart because this early show of preference means that stories are becoming more than just entertainment for your child—they’re also sources of comfort.
- **Tune-up your tone.** Reading with excitement by including silly voices and varying rhythms will naturally draw children into stories, thereby creating positive effects for their cognitive and language development.
- **Show your interest.** Designating a time every day for stories should be fun for both children and adults, and your child will be encouraged to read if you enjoy books as well.
families and employees consumer health care information as well as popular reading materials for the past 10 years. Books can be checked out for two weeks at a time, and anyone not directly affiliated with the hospital has the option of gaining an interlibrary loan through their public library, hospital or school.

“We offer many easy-to-read and picture books to help support developmental skills,” says Brenda Pfannenstiel, MA, MLS, AHIP, Manager of Library Services at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics. “Learning pre-reading skills, such as how a book works and becoming familiar with letters, is vital for young children. For older children, we have books at every reading and age level that entertain, comfort and help them understand their health care.”

Encouraging an Interest
As children begin reading on their own, they can, at times, wish to replace the traditional wonders of a book in exchange for a glowing video screen.

“There are many sources of entertainment, such as television and video games, that compete with children’s attention,” says Pfannenstiel. “It is important for parents to try to encourage a love for reading because having good reading skills is a lifelong necessity for receiving a quality education, retaining job skills and understanding health care decisions.”

For more information on pre-reading skills or to search the library catalog, visit www.childrensmercy.org, and select “Kreamer Family Resource Center” under “Departments.”

The Department of Hearing and Speech at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics offers Phonological Awareness and pre-reading classes. Please call (913) 696-8863 to find out more.
More than 24,000 children were injured in pedestrian-related traffic accidents in 2007, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to keep your child safe.

**Pedestrian Safety 101**

Keep these basic road safety tips in mind to ensure that your children stay safe when playing outdoors or walking home from school:

- Children under age 10 should never cross a street without a grown-up.
- Teach your children to stop at the curb or edge of the road and to look left, right and left again for traffic before and while crossing the street.
- Teach your children to recognize and obey all traffic signs and markings, such as “WALK” and “DON’T WALK” signals and to always cross at a crosswalk.
- Teach your children not to enter the street from between parked cars or from behind bushes or shrubs.
- Remind your children to be extra alert in bad weather. Visibility may be poor, and motorists might not be able to see children as well.

Get a step up on safety in the Child Health Library at www.childrensmercy.org.
Summer Sun Safety

The summer sun’s powerful ultraviolet (UV) rays can put your child’s skin in danger, but with the right sunscreen and safe habits, you can keep your children healthy and protected from sunburns.

For most people, the majority of their sun exposure occurs before they reach age 18. During childhood and the teen years, skin is particularly vulnerable to harmful UV rays.

Children 6 months of age or older should use sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15, whereas kids with fair skin should use a minimum of SPF 30 to prevent sunburn.

To ensure your children receive maximum protection from the sun, follow these rules for using sunscreen:

- Apply sunscreen anytime your child goes outside to play, even on cloudy days.
- Use sunscreen generously, making sure to cover all areas that will be exposed to sunlight.
- Put sunscreen on your children 30 minutes before they go outside.
- Reapply sun block every two to three hours.
- If your child is swimming or near water, be sure to use waterproof sunscreen and reapply every time your child gets out of the water.

Feeling the Burn

Even with the use of sunscreen, your child may still get sunburned. Most pain associated with sunburns will go away after 48 hours. However, you should consult your pediatrician if the burn looks inflamed or produces blisters.

For more tips on staying sunburn-free, visit the Child Health Library at www.childrensmercy.org.

Is Aspartame Dangerous for Kids?

There has been debate over the safety of aspartame—a no-calorie sweetener made of two amino acids—for years. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration maintains it’s safe for use by most children* and adults, provided consumption is limited to 50 milligrams of aspartame per 2.2 pounds of body weight per day.

To help gauge daily consumption:

- One packet of Equal® contains 37 milligrams
- One 12-ounce can of diet soda contains 225 milligrams

Aspartame is often found in low-sugar or sugar-free versions of foods, such as pudding or yogurt.

If your child consumes recommended amounts of aspartame but experiences adverse symptoms, such as mood changes, dizziness, gastrointestinal problems or skin rashes, consult your pediatrician.

To help your child make healthier choices, visit the Child Health Library at www.childrensmercy.org and search for “diet decision.”

*People with phenylketonuria should avoid aspartame because they are unable to break down one of its compounds.

And the Winner Is...

Congratulations to the Chappell family of St. Joseph, Missouri! They won the giveaway for the free gift certificate to Worlds of Fun for filling out and submitting the Readership Survey from our spring issue.

Thanks to all our readers who sent in their valuable feedback.

Children’s Mercy Joins New Wave of Social Media

Be sure to add Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics on your favorite social networking sites. You can become a fan of Children’s Mercy on Facebook™, sign up to follow current hospital activities on Twitter™ and view hospital videos on YouTube™. Just go to Facebook, YouTube and Twitter and search for “Children’s Mercy Hospital.”

Here’s where to find us!

Children’s Mercy Hospital and Outpatient Center
2401 Gillham Rd.
Kansas City, MO 64108
(816) 234-3000

Children’s Mercy Northland
501 N.W. Barry Rd.
Kansas City, MO 64155
(816) 413-2500

Children’s Mercy South
5808 W. 110th St.
Overland Park, KS 66211
(913) 696-8000

Children’s Mercy Home Care Missouri
2400 Pershing Rd., Garden Level
Kansas City, MO 64108
(816) 701-4300

Primary Care Clinics

Children’s Mercy West/
The Cordell Meeks Jr. Clinic
4313 State Ave.
Kansas City, KS 66102
(913) 233-4400

Pediatric Care Center
Children’s Mercy Hospital Clinic and Research Bldg.
2nd Floor
2401 Gillham Rd.
Kansas City, MO 64108
(816) 234-3080

Teen Clinic
4605 Paseo Blvd., Suite 200
Kansas City, MO 64110
(816) 234-3050

The latest child health information can be delivered directly to your e-mail inbox each month through our FREE monthly e-newsletter, Healthy Kids News. To subscribe to this or other Children’s Mercy publications, including Safe & Sound, visit www.childrensmercy.org and click on “Newsletters” today!
A Million Reasons to Trust.

Colton and Carter’s family chose Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics because we offer the highest level of neonatal intensive care in the region. Two years after treating Colton for a perinatal stroke, we provided the same great care for his brother Carter when he was born 12 weeks prematurely.

There are a million reasons to choose Children’s Mercy.

What’s yours?

“We didn’t skip a beat when asked which hospital we wanted him transported to.”

– Bobbie C.