

New School Year Almost Here; Are You Ready?

Written by Staff Writer

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For some kids, going back to school can be like carrying the weight of the world, either on their backs or their eyelids. Here are a few tips to transition your child from summer fun to school with ease.

Backpack Safety

Backpacks are a very handy way for your child to carry his books and other school materials. But they can also put strain on his back muscles and joints and cause back pain if used incorrectly. Help your child avoid lower back pain and injury this year by following these simple tips:

- Buy a backpack with two wide, padded straps that go over the shoulders. Make sure your child uses both straps at all times.
- Choose a backpack with a padded waist or chest belt. This distributes weight more evenly across the body. Multiple compartments also help distribute the weight.
- Your child's backpack should not be wider than his body.
- When fully loaded, your child's backpack should weigh less than 15 percent of his body weight. Use your bathroom scale to measure the maximum backpack load so your child can know what it should feel like.
- Heavier items should be placed closer to the back of the backpack, near the body.
- Picking up the backpack properly is important. As with any heavy object, your child should bend at the knees and grab the pack with both hands when lifting it to his shoulders.

Sleep

During summer vacation, many children and teens get to stay up later and sleep in longer than they would during the school year. This shift often makes returning to an earlier schedule difficult. Getting enough sleep is important to a student's physical health and school performance.

According to the National Sleep Foundation's (NSF) Sleep in America polls, children and teens are not getting enough sleep. School-aged children get an average of 1.5 hours less than the recommended 10 to 11 hours of sleep per school night. Only 20 percent of adolescents get the recommended nine hours of sleep per school night. Nearly half of all adolescents sleep less than eight hours on school nights.

The NSF recommends parents and students start adjusting their sleep schedules early in order to be well-rested, alert and prepared for the start of the school year.

Here are some tips for getting your child back on the right sleep schedule:

- Two weeks to a month before the start of the school year, start shifting the time your child gets out of bed in the morning. Start with the usual time he is waking up and gradually move the time earlier about 30 minutes every other day.
- Move your child's bedtime earlier the same amount of time (about 30 minutes every other day) as the wake-up time. You may be surprised that bedtime will not be as much of a battle since your child will be pretty sleepy by then.
- Soak in the summer's last days with morning activities instead of late nights. Emphasize physical activity and bright light in the morning: go outside, take a walk or jog or play with friends.
- Wind-down time is best delayed until evening, when they are indoors in dim light, with more quiet activities as bedtime nears.
- Help your child maintain a regular bedtime, especially when he reaches the goal for the best bedtime and wake-up time for school.
- Avoid exercising two to three hours before bed time.
- Avoid "screen time" on the computer, watching TV or playing video games an hour before

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bed time.

- Everything should wind down and get quieter as bedtime approaches. Children and teens respond well to a few minutes of focused time with a parent in the evening. This gives them a chance to share what is on their mind before bed.

- Create a good sleep environment: cool, dark, quiet and comfortable.

- Limit caffeine, especially after lunchtime.

- Turn off the TV and have a set time when the cell phone is turned off. Studies show that the more electronics in the adolescent's bedroom, the more likely they will get insufficient sleep at night.