



# Life Balance

Healthy matters to keep in mind.

August 2015

## Healthy tips for making it a banner school year

A child may regard the new school year with a smile, a shrug or a groan. Often it's a mix of all three. Will I get the teacher I want? Will my friends be in my class? Is my backpack cool enough? This is also a case where "new" might not feel like an improvement. It's tough to be the new kid or start at a new school. Even starting a new grade can feel like a big change. Remind your student that it's normal to feel nervous at the start of something new. Be open and ask about his or her concerns so you can talk about them.<sup>1</sup>

Open communication helps you better understand what your child needs to make this a banner year. It's also important to make sure the basics are covered. Healthy sleep habits and proper nutrition fuel growing minds and bodies. Then there's what may be a kid's least favorite subject: homework.

For parents, there's good news on that front, to be discussed later.

### A healthy start

Getting back into the school year routine is easier when healthy habits are in place. That means getting a good night's sleep. Between the ages of 5 and 12, kids need 10 or 11 hours of sleep each night. Of course, some need more and some need less. Although most kids will never admit it, lack of rest can make them cranky. So when he's well rested, talk about why sleep is important. Give examples that matter to him. It's harder to follow directions. Schoolwork becomes a chore. And being sleepy can make you clumsy at sports. Healthy sleep habits include going to bed at the same time every night and creating a calming bedtime routine, with a warm bath or reading a book together.<sup>2</sup> Many studies have shown that kids (and adults) who are exposed to TV, computer or other electronic media go to bed later and sleep less. The sleep loss is even greater for those who have these devices in their bedrooms.<sup>3</sup>

Eating breakfast is another important habit. According to a report commissioned by the No Kid Hungry campaign, 73 percent of teachers say they teach students who come to school hungry. Hungry kids have trouble concentrating. They lack energy and perform poorly at schoolwork. Many teachers believe hunger even causes discipline problems. This same study showed that of the students who qualify for free or reduced-price breakfast and lunch, only half of them eat both meals. Reasons vary from late buses to concerns about being singled out as being poor. For many schools, the solution is to serve "breakfast after the bell," in the classroom. Teachers take attendance or collect homework while kids fuel their brain with healthy food.<sup>4</sup>

Whether your child eats breakfast at home or at school, make sure she's choosing the right foods. To maximize brain power, offer foods that are low in sugar and rich in whole grains, fiber and protein. This may help boost their attention span, concentration and memory.<sup>5</sup>

## Vaccines prevent illness and save lives

It's that time of year when schools ask parents to make sure students are up to date on vaccines. This helps keep your kids, their classmates and the entire community healthier. The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention says there are 14 diseases that can be prevented with vaccines:<sup>6</sup>

- Diphtheria
- Hepatitis A
- Hepatitis B
- Hib (leading cause of bacterial meningitis)
- Flu
- Measles
- Mumps
- Whooping cough
- Pneumococcal disease
- Polio
- Rotavirus
- Rubella
- Tetanus
- Chickenpox

To learn more about vaccine safety and schedules, visit [www.cdc.gov/vaccines](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines).

## SEAP

Call Toll-free  
1-800-692-7459  
1-800-824-4306 (TDD)

or log on to  
[www.liveandworkwell.com](http://www.liveandworkwell.com)  
access code: Pennsylvania



## Resources

[www.liveandworkwell.com](http://www.liveandworkwell.com)

Do a search under “school” to find articles and links to related resources. From here, you can also access the Preschool and Youth and Preteen and Teen Centers. Download the Childcare Guide found in the LiveWell section under Childcare. Scroll down to find the guide under Guides.

### Get ready

If possible, attend the school’s open house or meet-the-teacher event. You’ll learn a lot about what to expect in the coming year. Here are a few other things to consider:<sup>7</sup>

- Health: Complete and return health and emergency contact forms. If your child takes medication during the day, talk with the school nurse.
- Getting there: Will your student be walking or taking the bus? Review safety rules. Walk the route to school or the bus stop with your child.
- Clothes: Are there rules about what students can and can’t wear? Will they need to bring clothes for gym or art class?

### Get organized

When it comes to homework, help your kids stay on track, but make it clear that schoolwork is their responsibility. With some kids, it’s helpful to go through their backpack together each evening. You want to make sure you’re not missing any notes or forms from school.

Set a “homework hour” at the same time every evening, whether it’s at a desk in the child’s bedroom or at the dinner table. When a big project is due, encourage your child to break it into chunks. It may help to make a work schedule, including breaks.<sup>8</sup>

How much should parents help with homework? Not much, according to a 30-year study of how parents’ involvement affects academic success. The study found that consistent homework help from parents almost never improves test scores or grades. In fact, kids whose parents regularly help with homework usually perform worse. This was true regardless of social class, racial or ethnic background or grade level.<sup>9</sup>

That doesn’t mean you shouldn’t be engaged in your child’s life at school. Just don’t feel bad if you can’t figure out math homework or help out at school. Instead, ask your child, “Do you want me to go on a field trip?” Some kids prefer their parents being less involved, which is no reflection on your relationship.

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2. What sleep is and why all kids need it. Kids Health. [http://kidshealth.org/kid/stay\\_healthy/body/not\\_tired.html](http://kidshealth.org/kid/stay_healthy/body/not_tired.html).  
3. Shochat T. Impact of lifestyle and technology developments on sleep. *Nature and Science of Sleep*. 2012; 4:19-31. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3630968/>  
4. Hunger in our schools: Share Our Strength’s Teachers Report 2013. [www.nokidhungry.org/pdfs/NKH\\_TeachersReport\\_2013.pdf](http://www.nokidhungry.org/pdfs/NKH_TeachersReport_2013.pdf).  
5. Breakfast basics. Kids Health. [http://kidshealth.org/parent/nutrition\\_center/healthy\\_eating/breakfast.html#cat20738](http://kidshealth.org/parent/nutrition_center/healthy_eating/breakfast.html#cat20738).  
6. Parent’s guide to childhood immunizations. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. Download at [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/parents-guide/downloads/parents-guide-508.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/parents-guide/downloads/parents-guide-508.pdf).

7. American Academy of Pediatrics. Checklist for the first day of school. <http://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/Checklist-for-the-First-Day-of-School.aspx>.  
8. Top 10 homework tips. KidsHealth. <http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/learning/homework.html#cat169>.  
9. Robinson K, Harris A. The broken compass: Parental involvement with children’s education. <http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674725102&content=biobios>; <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/04/12/parental-involvement-is-overrated/>.