



## Include tissues, vitamins when back-to-school

Evelyn Gilbert Manziello, For Living & Being August 26, 2016

Each September school starts and so does the onslaught of colds and viruses kids get and bring home to you.

“September illnesses occur commonly for the season they are specific to and also due to the fact children are touching each other more now that they are back in school,” said Dr. Lauren Vigna, who treats adults and children using traditional as well as holistic medical therapies at First Care Family Practice in Highland.

While flu season starts in the later fall months, Lauren Van Buren, MS, PA-C, a physician assistant at Bambini Pediatrics in Poughkeepsie, said the common cold can have your kids off and running for a tissue even before their first gym class.

Van Buren recommends parents remind kids to focus on basic hygiene like hand-washing. Staying hydrated during the day at school is also important to help keep students well, she said.

“Kids are gathering in a close-quarters environment. They share germs easily through not covering a cough or sneeze, or putting hands in the mouth,” Van Buren said.

While coming down with a bug here or there is a normal rite of passage, there are many methods you and your children can use to try and prevent the inevitable invasion from causing them to miss class.

“Enough sleep, a healthy diet and stress reduction, including exercise, are the three most important influencers of our immune system function,” Vigna said. “Make sure to pay attention to them all for yourself and your children.”

While getting enough sleep is often difficult in our oft overscheduled lives it really is a vital part of staying well in the short and long-term.

“Ongoing sleep deficiency can raise your risk for some chronic health problems, such as depression, obesity, hypertension, heart disease and stroke,” Van Buren said. “It also can affect how well you think, react, work, learn and get along with others.”

The definition of enough sleep varies by age.

According to Dr. Peter Kaplan, a child psychologist based in Poughkeepsie, New Paltz and Nyack, Rockland County, getting enough good quality sleep is very important especially in stressful situations like starting a new school year.



“There is a direct link between sleep deprivation and lowering of immune function,” he said, noting that reducing the amount of artificial light and keeping the bedroom temperature on the cool side can be beneficial.

To help your kid get a good night’s rest, “you should keep the room fairly dark,” Kaplan said, noting that you should also try to keep your child calm before bed because when kids are over excited they have a hard time falling asleep. He also recommends that all electronics be turned off an hour or two before they hit the sheets.

Whether it be from lack of sleep or something else, if your kid tends to get nervous about school it may impact their physical health, experts warn.

“Stress causes chronic inflammation and lowers the immunity of those who otherwise might have a healthy immune system, thereby increasing vulnerability to infectious and autoimmune disease,” Van Buren said.

One technique that parents can use to help manage a child’s school stress is structure.

“The less chaos and the more structure in the morning the better,” Kaplan said. A structured morning routine can become something kids expect and that’s comforting.

Responding calmly, focusing on the positive rather than the negative by reframing an upsetting situation may also help anxious kids get through difficulties at school, Kaplan added. If your child is upset about an incident at school it’s important to truly listen to him or her.

“If our kids know we will listen without judgment and communicate that we are available, and will empathize that goes a long way,” he said, noting that assisting distressed younger children by labeling their feelings also can be helpful.



While stress management and getting good quality sleep are essential to help ward off illnesses so are providing health-promoting meals. Focusing on what you include and what you leave out of your kids’ diet are equally important.

“To boost your immune system it’s good to avoid pasteurized cow’s milk, boxed processed foods, foods made with white flour or foods with a high glycemic index,” Van Buren said. “They suppress the immune system because they cause inflammation.”

To reduce inflammation, you can try adding foods that are high in healthy fats and have antioxidants, such as salmon, berries, avocado, flaxseed, garlic, ginger, yogurt, almonds and turmeric.

Eating vitamin C-rich foods, such as spinach and citrus fruits, as well as antioxidant-filled fruits and veggies is another helpful cold-fighting strategy, Vigna said, adding that indulging in sugar overload is a big no-no if you want to stay well. So when you’re packing that lunch box don’t cave in to your kids’ candy cravings too often.

Taking supplements to try and prevent sicknesses as well as help the body fight them is another effective wellness strategy. However, before taking any supplements it's important to check with your healthcare provider.

Vigna recommends probiotics for both kids and parents. "They help increase immune system function as the majority of the immune system is located in the gut," she said. Children can take five to 20 colony forming units a day.

If strep is spreading through your child's school there is a special probiotic you may also want to add to your regimen, according to Van Buren.

"Life Extension Probiotic Florassist Throat Health probiotic with *S. salivarius* is a good option," she said, noting that studies show it may reduce the incidence of strep throat and other viruses that cause sore throat symptoms. "The organisms in this probiotic survive naturally in the throat, maximizing their potential to promote throat health by helping to ease inflammation and inhibit the damage caused by strep bacteria and viruses."

Other vitamins may help prevent and lessen the symptoms of a variety of sicknesses. Vitamin D is a "large player in healthy immune system function," Dr. Vigna said, and children can take 1,000 IU a day to boost their immune systems. Vitamin C is another powerful immune system booster. It may reduce the length of viral infections. Vigna recommends children ages 2-6 take 250 mg a day and those over 6 can take 500 mg a day.

"Zinc is also helpful in decreasing length of viral illnesses and preventing them," she said and that 10-20 mg a day for children 2-6 and 20-40 mg a day for children over 6 are appropriate doses.

While all of these immune-boosting and sickness-fighting tips may lessen the number of trips to the doctor this year, you and your child probably won't make it through without catching any bugs. So when you stock up on pencils, notebooks and erasers, don't forget the tissues. You'll likely still need them.

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## **Sleep guidelines**

The National Sleep Foundation's daily guidelines are as follows:

- Newborn (0-3 months): 14-17 hours
- Infants (4-11 months): 12-15 hours
- Toddler (1-2 years): 11-14 hours
- Preschool (3-5 years): 10-13 hours
- School age (6-13 years): 9-11 hours
- Teens (14-17 years): 8-10 hours
- Adults 18 and up: 7-9 hours