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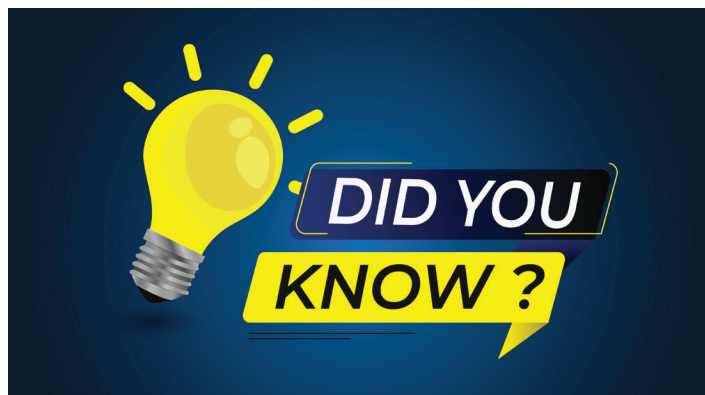
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Dinking water is essential for good health, especially when warm temperatures increase the risk for dehydration. Many people are familiar with the general guideline that recommends drinking eight to 10 full glasses of water and other beverages a day. But what about hydration and companion animals? Ensuring a dog, cat or other pet is getting enough water is complicated. After all, one cannot force a pet to drink. However, Figo Pet Insurance says, on average, a healthy adult dog needs between one-half and one ounce of fresh water per one pound of body weight, daily. Therefore, a 50-pound dog will require anywhere from 25 to 50 ounces of water a day, or roughly three to eight cups of water. Cats often require less water, but still should have constant access to fresh water. Temperature will impact how much pets need to drink. In hot weather or after exertion, pets will need more water to regulate body temperature. PetMD also says that pets that eat dry food (kibble) may generally drink more water than those who eat wet food, as the latter receive more moisture from their diet than the former. Pet owners should discuss concerns about water intake with veterinarians if something seems amiss. Gently pinching the skin near the pet's shoulder blades can offer a quick assessment of proper hydration. The skin should return to normal immediately. If it doesn't, the pet may be dehydrated. Also, pets who are drinking excessive amounts of water may have an underlying health issue, which also should be promptly addressed by a vet.



Drinking water is essential for good health, especially when warm temperatures increase the risk for dehydration.

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DIABETIC NEUROPATHY patient found

RELIEF

in clinical trial

Two years ago, Chris Mooney was at the end of his rope. At the time, the 62-year-old was battling excruciating pain from movements as simple as getting out of a car. Then his back, hip, leg and foot pain became constant, making everyday activities increasingly difficult.

Mooney tried medication, physical therapy and injections, but nothing seemed to help. As the pain worsened, his leg muscles grew weak. For a school custodian whose job requires constant physical labor — and a “Pa” who loves wrestling with his 12-year-old grandson — this was terrifying.

“I thought the worst,” Mooney said. “Am I losing my ability to walk? Am I losing my ability to move, do ordinary things, go to the store? The unknown was what worried me.”

Today, Mooney tells a very different story. He’s back to walking 20,000 steps a day without pain — thanks to a matchbook-sized device and a clinical trial. What happened?

DIABETIC NEUROPATHY: THE ‘WHY’ BEHIND CHRIS’S PAIN

After consultation and testing at Novant Health Spine Specialists - Kimel Park in Winston-Salem in August 2023, Mooney learned he had diabetic neuropathy, a type of nerve damage that can occur in up to 50% of people with diabetes when blood sugar is too high.

In the ensuing years, Mooney had worked hard to manage his Type 2 diabetes — but his blood sugar hadn’t always been well controlled during the last two decades.

This led to “peripheral neuropathy,” the most common type of diabetic neuropathy, which can cause sharp pain, muscle weakness, a burning sensation and numbness, and can seriously damage the feet.

The good news? Although neuropathy can’t be reversed, Mooney had an intriguing option to help him deal with the pain, thanks to Novant Health’s participation in leading-edge research.

A CLINICAL TRIAL OFFERED NEW TREATMENT OPTION

Mooney’s team offered him the chance to enroll in a clinical trial for a spinal cord stimulator (SCS), a 2-inch device implanted in the spinal cord that blocks the messages about nerve pain being sent to your brain. An



SCS doesn’t repair nerve damage, but it interrupts the pain messages with stimulation — so instead of feeling pain, the user feels a gentle buzzing or vibrating sensation, which they can control with a remote control.

In previous phases of the clinical trial, this SCS had been shown to help other patients with diabetic neuropathy. The study team was almost certain it could help Mooney too.

A SKEPTIC TURNED BELIEVER

Mooney was initially skeptical, wondering, “Do I really want to be a guinea pig?” (It’s understandable that many of us view clinical trials this way. But patients are not really guinea pigs. See below for more on this.)

However, as he learned more about the safety and monitoring that goes into the clinical trial process — and as standard treatments failed — Mooney became open to the idea. “At this point, I will try anything,” he remembers saying.

Under the watchful eye of a principal investigator and study team, Mooney had the SCS taped to his back for a one-week test run and learned to use the remote control to change frequencies and settings of the SCS.

“It feels like a vibration that goes down my back, hips and legs, similar to a massage chair but more intense,” Mooney said. And to his delight: it worked. “I could walk — I could do whatever I wanted,” Mooney said. “I had relief.”

And so, just a few weeks later, Mooney had the SCS implanted in a short outpatient procedure. After a few days, Mooney was back in action. “The procedure wasn’t that big of a deal, but it made a huge impact on my life,” Mooney said.

LIFE TODAY

These days, Mooney easily meets his 5 a.m. report time at Central Middle School where he makes the school and grounds sparkle for students and staff. Off the clock, he helps his 85-year-old parents maintain their house, and he enjoys his grandchildren.

He loves adjusting the spine stimulator in real time. “If I’m doing a lot of strenuous stuff, a lot of walking and

lifting, I take that control and bump it up a little bit and keep right on going. On days I don't need that, I can lower it down," Mooney said. "It's given me my mobility back."

Mooney now encourages others to consider participating in clinical research if they get the opportunity. "You don't ever know until you try," Mooney said. To his study team, he would like to say, "Thank you for giving me back what I thought I was losing."

Helping patients and moving medicine forward:

WHY DOES NOVANT HEALTH PARTICIPATE IN CLINICAL TRIALS?

Novant Health is dedicated to helping find new ways to prevent, detect, treat and cure various medical conditions. Clinical research is happening across our locations, each guided by a principal investigator, supported by a study team, and governed by an institutional review board (IRB).

The IRBs at Novant Health are made up of experienced Novant Health team members, physicians, nurses, pharmacists and community representatives. Before any research is done, the host site's IRB will assess the study to make sure it is safe and ethical.

If there are concerns, they do not allow the study to occur. Once a study is approved, the IRB monitors the data coming in from the study to make sure the study remains safe for participants.

Patients are not subjected to random experiments like the guinea pigs of past scientific experiments.

Patients who meet study criteria can apply to become a voluntary participant in a clinical trial. Before joining, they are fully informed about the trial's purpose, methods, and the possible risks and benefits to them. They are also free to exit the study at any time.

In a phase 4 clinical trial, like the one Chris Mooney participated in, researchers have already determined if a new treatment is safe, what side effects it has, if it works, and if it's an improvement over standard treatment — and it's already received regulatory approval. In phase 4, researchers gather even more information about how a treatment works — before the treatment is widely available to patients outside of the trial.

"By participating in clinical trials, we can provide therapies that patients wouldn't otherwise be able to have access to," said Dr. Jeffrey Peacock, an anesthesiologist and pain medicine specialist at Novant Health Spine Specialists - Kimel Park in Winston-Salem who has worked on several clinical trials. "This, and other clinical trials like it, give our patients opportunities that improve their health and also help move our field further."

Although nervous at first, Mooney is glad he participated. "The more I got into it, the more I saw how involved it was and how much people cared about it. I'm glad I've done it," Mooney said. "My hope is that I can help somebody else to get the relief that they need so they can go on and have a better life and be out and able to do things like I am."

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COURTESY PHOTO
Amy back to the moments that matter
most. Spending time on the ballfield
with her great grandkids (Andrew, Arya,
Allie and Sidda)

Retired NURSE

SHARES HER EXPERIENCE WITH NORTHERN REGIONAL HOSPITAL'S STROKE TEAM

When Amy Quesinberry, MA, BSN, RN, NCSN-E, went to bed on a Friday night, she felt completely normal. By Saturday morning, everything had changed.

"I noticed my right hand was numb and my fine motor skills were greatly diminished," Amy recalled. "I couldn't turn on my lamp, brush my teeth, or brush my hair with my right hand. I knew something was wrong."

Amy immediately prepared to head to Northern Regional Hospital's Emergency Department. What happened next reinforced just how critical it is to seek immediate medical attention when stroke symptoms appear.

"When I got there, I was telling the lady at the desk about my symptoms," she said. "I heard a code stroke called and never thought it was for me, but it was."



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Within moments, Northern Regional Hospital's rapid stroke response team was in action.

"When the nurse came around with a wheelchair, immediately the stroke rapid response team came to provide care," Amy shared. "It was amazing how quickly everything happened."

Because Amy's stroke occurred while she was asleep, known as a "wake-up stroke", doctors could not determine exactly when her symptoms began, making thrombolytic therapy unsafe. Even so, the care team moved quickly to evaluate and treat her.

"In a matter of minutes, I had a CT Neck Angiography, CT head, chest X-ray, EKG, blood work, and many other

tests and scans," she said. "All of this happened so fast."

As a retired nurse herself, Amy said the level of care she received stood out immediately.

"The staff was amazing. I had the best care," she said. "Being a retired nurse and in my professional opinion, Northern Regional Hospital is the best."

Amy continued to receive support even after leaving the hospital through the hospital's Stroke Bridge Program, which helps patients transition safely from hospitalization to recovery at home.

"The support I received from the NRH Stroke Bridge Center was excellent," she said. "They were excellent and a much-needed follow-up. The care coordinator called me a month after I was discharged to check on me. After a stroke, you need this kind of follow-up. There are so many questions following a stroke. Having this valuable resource is needed."

Today, Amy encourages others in the community to recognize the warning signs of stroke and seek help immediately.

"If you notice symptoms of a stroke, get help immediately," she said. "Educate yourself on the symptoms of a stroke. It could save your life. The quicker you get to the hospital, the better outcome you will have."

Her experience also gave her a new appreciation for the importance of having trusted stroke care available close to

home.

"Never thought I would be in a situation where the stroke response team was needed," Amy shared. "Northern Regional Hospital has the best stroke response team I have ever seen. They are amazing."

Amy also remembers one special moment that reminded her how deeply personal patient care can be.

"I told Dr. Eric Melvin I needed to be discharged on Monday because my great-granddaughters had a softball game," she said with a smile. "When he discharged me on Monday, he said, 'Go enjoy your great-granddaughters' game,' and I did."

Northern Regional Hospital encourages the community to learn the warning signs of stroke using the acronym BE FAST:

- **Balance** – Sudden loss of balance or coordination
- **Eyes** – Sudden trouble seeing
- **Face** – Facial drooping
- **Arms** – Arm weakness or numbness
- **Speech** – Slurred speech or difficulty speaking
- **Time** – Time to call 911 immediately

Fast action can save lives and improve recovery outcomes. To learn more about stroke services at Northern Regional Hospital, visit Northern Regional Hospital or speak with your healthcare provider.



Joan Priddy-Southern, NP from NewHope Medical Group

Joan Priddy-Southern started working at 17 as a nursing assistant at the hospital in Danbury and has been a nurse for over 40 years. She has worked in numerous fields over her career including orthopedics, oncology, home care including intravenous therapy and pain management.

Priddy-Southern is now certified as a nurse practitioner for adults, age 13 and up and gerontology. She focuses on the whole patient, not just practicing medicine but teaching and learning wellness strategies.

As a Nurse Practitioner, she can do many things a regular doctor would do such as order referrals and send to specialists, regular and sports physicals, plus manage chronic health conditions.

She is glad to be back in her community and closer to her hometown roots.



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5 SIGNS *a student might be too busy*

Many students pack all sorts of activities into their schedules in an effort to be as fulfilled and well-rounded as possible. Parents may urge even the youngest of children to join activities in an effort to make friends and “be involved.” Colleges may require students to participate in a certain number of sports or clubs in order to be considered for acceptance, and students may even carry these extracurriculars into their higher education years to boost résumés they ultimately send to prospective employers.

While music lessons, soccer practice and dance classes are enriching activities that can offer an array of benefits, a packed schedule can quickly become too much. Overloading a schedule with school work, a part-time job and other activities can keep a student involved, but it is essential that students and their families learn to recognize when they may be too busy for their own good. According to the University of Rochester Medicine, studies show that children need free time to decompress, use their imaginations and develop thinking skills. A study published in *Frontiers in Psychology* found nearly half of 128 surveyed students reported feeling very stressed on a daily basis. Here are five signs a student is taking on too much.

1. Not getting enough sleep: According to a national study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about seven out of 10 high school students report that they do not get enough sleep. Students who are staying up later and later to get things done because of jam-packed schedules may be too busy.

2. Grades are slipping: Sudden difficulty with school is another sign of being over-extended. Activities may be taking up too much time and grades can start to drop as a result.

3. Newly occurring health problems: Students who complain of stomach pains or headaches may be stressed out. These problems can arise from anxiety, irregular meals and lack of sleep. Kids also may become more moody from having too much to do.

4. Complaining about tasks: Students who start to complain regularly or show diminished joy about participating in extracurriculars may have too much on their plates. There may be mention of not getting a break to hang out with friends or family.

5. Parents are stressed, too: Adults who are responsible for managing kids’ schedules and getting them to and from also may feel the stress of a schedule that is too hectic to handle.



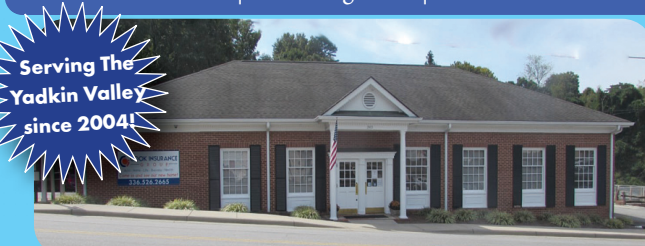
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Scaling back a student’s activity list might be just what is needed to alleviate anxiety and avoid additional side effects of being too busy.

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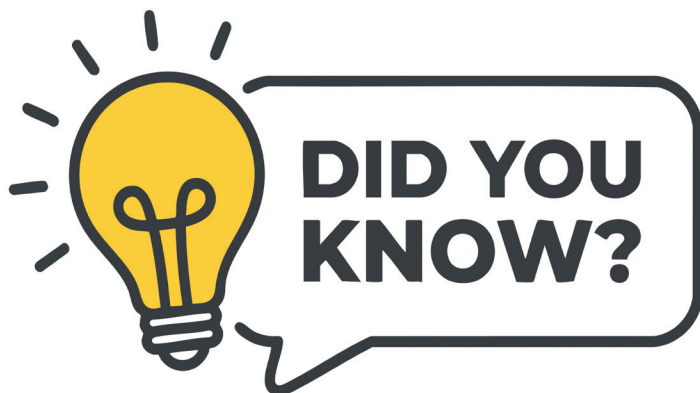
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Vaccination compliance remains mixed, according to various health outlets, with adherence to schedules on some vaccinations better than others. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 17.5 percent of adults and 9.8 percent of children are current on the COVID-19 vaccine. In addition, 43.9 percent of adults and 49.8 percent of children received the 2025-26 flu vaccine. However, the picture is brighter for routine vaccinations. National coverage for MMR, Polio and DTap remains high, with roughly 90 to 92 percent of children completing their primary series by age 24 months. About 81 percent of Canadians have completed their initial vaccination series, says Health Infobase. But only about 4 percent of the Canadian population is considered

completely current with their COVID-19 vaccinations per the latest health recommendations. Vaccinations should be discussed with a health care professional so individuals remain current on immunizations that can keep them healthy and safe.



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Over the course of the twentieth century, great strides were made in relation to diagnosing, treating and preventing disease

That work has continued into the twenty-first century, as the organization Voices for Vaccines notes that vaccines prevent more diseases now than they did even as recently as 30 years ago.

Despite the efficacy of vaccines, skepticism about them has been on the rise in recent years. According to the independent, nonpartisan policy institute the Center for American Progress, since the 2019-2020 school year, kindergarten vaccination rates for measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) have fallen below the 95 percent threshold required to maintain herd immunity. The herd immunity rate refers to the percentage of the population that must be immunized to prevent disease transmission. The reduced rate of MMR vaccination among kindergarten students is thus increasing their risk for MMR. Indeed, the Kaiser Family Foundation reports that 39 of the 50 states are now below the 95 percent herd immunity rate for measles.

The data noted by the Center for American Progress and the KFF is troubling and suggests the public may have a lot to gain from a refresher course on the numerous benefits of immunization.

• **Vaccines have saved more than 150 million lives over the last half century.** A 2024 study published in The Lancet estimated that vaccines saved 154 million lives across the globe between 1974 and 2024. Researchers

behind the study also noted that 95 percent of the lives saved during that 50-year period were children younger than five years old.

• **Vaccines have a lasting effect.** A 2024 report from researchers with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention noted that 117 million children were born in the United States between 1994 and 2023. The researchers behind the report estimated that over the lifetimes of those children, routine vaccinations would prevent 508 million cases of illness, 32 million hospitalizations, and one million deaths.

• **Vaccines save money.** Parents need not be reminded of the medical costs associated with children's health care. Vaccines can greatly reduce such costs, offering a net savings of \$540 billion in direct costs according to the 2024 report from the CDC. A separate report published in the journal Pediatrics in 2014 estimated that every dollar spent on childhood vaccination saves \$3 in direct medical care.

• **Vaccines are thoroughly vetted prior to being approved.** Voices for Vaccines notes that vaccines are among the most tested medical interventions in the world. Vaccines are subjected to a rigorous, multi-phased testing process, which includes three separate phases of clinical development involving human beings, before they can even be submitted to the Federal Drug Administration for regulatory review and approval.

Vaccine skepticism has risen in recent years. But immunization remains a vital component of public health and a highly effective way to reduce illnesses and diseases in the present and for years to come.

Family-friendly activities for a weekend trip TO THE SHORE



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Weekend excursions to a shoreline are a summertime tradition in many families. Oceans and lakes are sights to behold at all times of the year, but the warm air of summertime makes the months of July and August a particularly popular and fun time to spend a weekend by the water.

Swimming is a go-to activity when spending time by the water in summertime. Swimming also is family-friendly, making a dip in a lake or ocean an ideal way to pass the time during a weekend trip to the shore. But oceanfront and lakeside communities offer a wide range of other family-friendly activities that parents and children can enjoy during their next weekend getaway.

- **Fishing boat excursion:** Renting a boat or booking a fishing trip through a commercial vessel can make for a unique and fun way to spend a summer day or night. Seasoned boaters can rent their own boat, while those with little or no experience can leave the boating to the captain of a commercial vessel. While there's no guarantee everyone aboard will catch a fish, many commercial fishermen will do their best to ensure everyone goes home having caught a fish.

- **Water sports:** Families that love to get out and about can look to an assortment of water sports to stay entertained during their next trip to the shore. Jet skis, kayaks, canoes, paddleboards, and even surfing sessions can be booked at many waterfront destinations in the summertime. Rentals tend to be available for anyone without their own gear, but book early to ensure you won't miss out on a chance to navigate the waters in style.

- **Mini golf:** Perhaps no summertime activity is more

family-friendly than mini golf. Families need not be near the water to enjoy mini golf, but courses are staples of lakeside and oceanfront communities.

- **Whale watching:** This activity is exclusive to travelers visiting oceanfront locales, but whale watching ventures are wildly popular and a great way for families to get a sense of the scale of nature. Many whale watching excursions are between two and three hours in length, and vessels will transport passengers well out off the shoreline. Whales might be the focal point of these trips, but it's possible passengers will see additional marine life, including dolphins, on such excursions.

There's no shortage of family-friendly activities to enjoy when spending a summer weekend at a lakeside or oceanfront destination.



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Though it can be a tall order for grandparents to look after their grandchildren, the time grandparents spend with their children's children can provide some unique benefits.

How some SENIORS BENEFIT from looking after their **GRANDCHILDREN**

Modern seniors are spending a lot of time with their grandchildren, and much of that time is spent providing care for youngsters, which might be helping grandparents in some unique ways. According to the National Poll on Healthy Aging from the University of Michigan's Institute for Healthcare Policy & Innovation, 8 percent of grandparents provide daily or near-daily care for their grandchildren. One in five grandparents reports providing care for one or more grandchildren at least once a week.

Though it can be a tall order for grandparents to look after their grandchildren, the time grandparents spend with their children's children can provide some unique benefits. The National Poll on Healthy Aging found that 72 percent of people with grandchildren indicated they hardly ever feel isolated, compared to 62 percent without grandchildren. The poll also found that 13 percent of seniors without grandchildren indicated their mental health was fair or poor, while just 9 percent of seniors with

grandchildren characterized their mental health in that way.

Grandparents spending ample time with their grandchildren also may help to build stronger social and cultural connections between themselves and their grandkids. The healthy aging poll found that slightly more than six in 10 grandparents indicated they shared at least one meal with a grandchild or grandchildren over the previous month, and nearly half indicated they had prepared food for them. In addition, 36 percent of grandparents indicated they had baked or cooked with their grandkids over the previous month. One researcher who worked with the team behind the poll noted that eating and cooking with grandchildren affords grandparents an opportunity to pass down knowledge and recipes to younger generations.

Caregiving for grandchildren can be a tall order for grandparents. However, seniors who provide such care may be benefitting in some unique and important ways.

SHINING LIGHT on sunscreen use

The sun is vital for life on Earth. But the sun also poses a threat to human beings, particularly when they don't prioritize sun protection. Ultraviolet rays of the sun can cause damage to the skin, eyes and more, leading to premature aging, sunburn and even cancer.

Wearing sunglasses while in the sun and routinely applying sunscreen are some simple ways people can protect themselves from sun damage. Johns Hopkins Medicine says proper sunscreen use helps prevent most of the poor effects of sun exposure. Sunscreen needs to become a part of one's daily routine rather than just something to apply before a visit to the beach. The American Academy of Dermatology Association offers these tips from board-certified dermatologists regarding the proper use of sunscreen.

- **Use SPF 30 or higher.** Choose a sunscreen that has a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or higher, and look for one that is water-resistant and provides broad-spectrum coverage, which handles UVA and UVB rays.
- **Try tinted iron oxide.** Sunscreens that are tinted with iron oxide offer better protection for the skin against the development of dark spots. Iron oxide protects the skin from the sun's visible light.
- **Apply ahead of time.** It takes approximately 15 minutes for the skin to absorb sunscreen and provide protection. Therefore, it's best to apply it well before heading outdoors.
- **Don't be stingy.** It's important to use enough sunscreen. Most adults need about one ounce, at a minimum, of sunscreen. That's about enough to fill a shot glass. This will help fully cover skin that is not protected by clothing. When applying sunscreen to the face, at least one teaspoon is needed. Always rub sunscreen thoroughly into the skin to ensure it is absorbed and evenly distributed.
- **Recognize order doesn't matter.** As long as the sunscreen is at least SPF 30, water-resistant and broad-spectrum, the order it is applied does not matter. It can



be applied before or after other skin care products and makeup. It's best for a person to figure out what works for their routine.

- **Know that most ingredients work.** Sunscreens are often grouped into two categories: chemical and mineral. Chemical sunscreens use ingredients like octisalate or homosalate to work, while mineral sunscreens use either zinc oxide or titanium dioxide. Both chemical and mineral sunscreens are effective, but people with sensitive skin may want to go with mineral sunscreens, which often leave a noticeable white cast on the skin.

- **Reapply frequently.** It's important to reapply sunscreen every two hours, and immediately after swimming or sweating. People who get sunburned often use too little sunscreen or didn't reapply the product enough.

- **Check the expiration date.** Sunscreen expires and can become ineffective. If the sunscreen has been sitting around for awhile, it's probably best to toss it and buy a new bottle.

Skin is exposed to harmful UV rays every time a person goes outside — even on cloudy days and in winter. It is essential to make sunscreen application part of a daily wellness routine.

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Fruits and vegetables recommendations for **SCHOOL-AGED KIDS**



METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Growing bodies require lots of TLC so kids grow up to become healthy adults. According to the Healthy Eating Research (HER), a national research program dedicated to improving children's nutrition and preventing childhood obesity, school-aged children between the ages of five and eight are ready to learn about healthy eating.

Parents also might benefit from a rundown of what constitutes healthy eating for school-aged kids.

SERVING SIZES

Parents accustomed to reading food labels undoubtedly recognize that serving sizes are a key component on packaged goods. But what about fruits and vegetables that come without labels? HER notes the following are the standard serving sizes for kids between the ages of five and eight.

- **Fruits and vegetables:** $\frac{3}{4}$ cup. A $\frac{3}{4}$ cup serving of bananas equates to one medium-sized banana. Seven to eight broccoli florets is roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ cup, and one-half of a large potato is roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ cup as well.

- **Grains: 1 ounce.** A single slice makes up a 1-ounce serving of whole grain bread. Half of a whole grain bagel and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of brown rice also equals a single serving of grains for kids between the ages of five and eight.

- **Protein: 2 ounces.** A two-ounce serving of protein equates to two eggs or $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of chicken breast.

- **Dairy: 1 cup.** A single serving of dairy can be between six and eight ounces of unflavored milk (or a fortified soy beverage). Roughly three one-inch cubes of natural cheese

or six to eight ounces of yogurt also comprise one cup of dairy.

HOW MANY SERVINGS DO KIDS NEED?

HER notes that children between the ages of five and eight require multiple servings of fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy, and protein each day.

- **Fruits:** Two to three servings
- **Vegetables:** Two to four servings
- **Grains:** Two to three servings. HER advises that half of these servings should be whole grains, such as whole wheat bread or brown rice.
- **Dairy:** Three servings
- **Protein:** Two to three servings

WHAT ABOUT SNACKS?

Snacking is perhaps a bigger part of modern kids' lives than it was when their parents were youngsters. HER urges limiting kids' consumption of foods and beverages with added sugars and foods high in saturated fat and sodium. That's something to keep in mind at snack time, when it's easy to reach for something unhealthy but premade, like salty chips paired with a juice box loaded with added sugars, rather than something more nutritious that requires preparation. But HER urges parents to pick snacks that include items from two of the food groups noted above.

School-aged kids are old enough to start learning about nutrition and how to use food as healthy fuel throughout the day.

WHY IT PAYS

to take time off from work

Paid time off is a perk offered by most employers that enables workers to enjoy time away from work while still getting paid. Although the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics says approximately 90 percent of private industry receives paid time off, a Glassdoor study found only 23 percent of Americans take all of their available vacation time. And of those who took vacation, 54 percent reported working while away.

The pressures of deadlines, demanding workplaces and the need to get ahead can lead to a lot of unused vacation time. This can be a mistake, as there are many benefits to taking time away from work.

- **Recharge your batteries.** Taking time off from work enables you to avoid mental and physical burnout. Psychology Today says you may gain new perspectives on workplace stressors and put plans in place to mitigate stress while on vacation.

- **Fuel creativity.** Downtime activates creative thinking, which can spark innovation and more. Studies from Stanford and the University of California have shown people are 60 percent more creative after walking or taking short breaks compared to those who are at their desks all the time. Vacations can expand mental horizons.

- **Increase productivity.** Even though it sounds counterintuitive, working less can lead to getting more done. Companies that encourage time off often see higher engagement, increased innovation and lower burnout rates.

- **Increase self-awareness of your value.** Apart from avoiding burnout and being more productive, an important reason to take time off is because you've earned it. It is one way to set boundaries with an employer. If you don't take your vacation time, an employer may expect more and more from you.

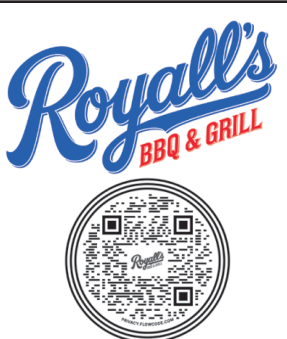


- **Strengthen relationships.** When you're always in a work-inspired go, go, go mindset, it is easy to lose sight of what really matters. Taking time off enables you to connect with loved ones and engage in activities that bring you joy.

Taking advantage of paid time off from work can improve your mental and physical health and even benefit your career.



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What parents can do to avoid

OVERSCHEDULING STUDENTS

The start of a new school year presents a fresh opportunity for students. Parents know that the start of a new school year also means a return to the hustle and bustle that many households with school-aged children have grown accustomed to. When that hectic period begins, parents may wonder if their children are overscheduled and, if so, what effect that might be having on their performance in the classroom?

A 2024 study published in the journal *Economics of Education Review* found that modern students could be dealing with a host of adverse consequences due to what's piled onto their plates during the school year. According to the study, the amount of homework students are assigned coupled with the abundance of extracurriculars students now participate in is not helping them to build their academic skills but is harming their mental health by increasing feelings of anxiety, anger and depression.

Choosing where to draw the line regarding students' schedules is not an exact science. But parents can consider a number of strategies as they seek to avoid overscheduling their kids in the coming school year.

- **Take an age-based approach.** While parents may feel structured activities can benefit kids of all ages, some childhood development experts note that organized activities may not be as beneficial to younger children as they are to older kids. Andie Stallman, a clinical and developmental health and psychology specialist and the childhood and play expert at Imagination Playground, notes that childhood development professionals suggest that organized activities prior to age six and seven are not developmentally appropriate. Stallman notes at this age kids should be encouraged to discover their own interests through self-directed play and exploration. Kids can still engage in organized activities at this age, but the focus should be on fun and socialization more than building skills and improving performance. As kids advance

through elementary school, parents can talk to them about organized extracurricular activities and which ones, if any, they want to participate in.

- **Keep a running dialogue about the schedule.**

Parents understandably don't want kids to quit, but it's also important that kids are encouraged to let Mom and Dad know if they feel they have too much on their plate. The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry recommends parents encourage kids to be open about their schedules, especially if they feel overwhelmed by their obligations, and let them know that it's alright and healthy to take a break. The AACAP also urges parents to talk to kids about their thoughts and feelings when children repeatedly resist an activity.

- **Learn to spot the warning signs of an overscheduled child.** Children do not want to disappoint their parents, so even those encouraged to share their thoughts about their activities and schedules may hesitate to speak up if they feel overwhelmed. With that in mind, parents can learn to spot the early warning signs that a child may be overwhelmed, which the AACAP notes include:

- *Making excuses or refusing to go to the activity*
- *Feeling over-tired or not having enough time to sleep*
- *Exhibiting problems with organization or struggling to meet deadlines*
- *Declining school grades*
- *Unexplained physical symptoms, such as headaches or stomach aches*
- *Increased anxiety*

It can be difficult for parents to avoid overscheduling kids. But it's important that parents remember the value of free time for youngsters. More information about striking a balance when it comes to kids' schedules can be found at aacap.org.



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Make a **POSITIVE** impact in kids' lives

It has been 41 years since Whitney Houston sang the lyrics, "I believe the children are our future," but the sentiment still stands strong today. Investing in the success and well-being of children is one of the most impactful things a person can do for the future of society.

Research increasingly points to the quality of a child's environment and his or her relationships as important components of development. There are certain ways adults can fundamentally alter a child's long-term outcomes for the better.

THE POWER OF PRESENCE

The adage presence over presents remains true. A critical factor in the healthy development of children is the presence of at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive adult, says a 2024 review in Child Health Nursing Research. Instability can greatly affect a child, and the 2024 review points to the foster care system to support that assertion. Each additional move a child makes in foster care is associated with weaker attachment formation and a heightened risk of mental health problems. Consistency and being around for children are the most positive things adults can do for kids.

CULTIVATE RESILIENCE

Emotional resilience is the ability to adapt to challenges, manage stress and recover from setbacks. It is important for children's lifelong success, says the Center of the Developing Child at Harvard University. Adults can encourage proactive problem-solving and not jump in to "fix" everything. They also can teach stress management techniques and model positive coping strategies. Educating children that others have different goals and feelings can help them better navigate socially.

PROVIDE THE SUPPORT NEEDED

Ensuring that kids have access to the educational tools they need is key to their success. According to a 2018 study that examined the impact of early childhood education, children who receive early intervention services before age three demonstrate significantly higher academic achievement by the third grade. Early intervention is a system of support and services for young children with developmental delays or disabilities. Even children who do not need EI should be exposed to a wide array of educational materials so they can foster a love of learning.

Children can benefit from certain behaviors and interventions that can result in positive changes for the future.

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