

School's out for summer

SCHOOL'S OUT FOR SUMMER – AND THAT CAN OFTEN MEAN THE ONSET OF BRAIN DRAIN. SO HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR KIDS STICK TO A HEALTHY SCHEDULE WHILE STILL HAVING FUN? BY MARY MUSCARI, PhD, CRNP, CS

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Summertime signals freedom for most kids, but too much of a good thing can create some rough patches once school starts.

According to the Center for Summer Learning at Johns Hopkins University, teachers often spend four to six weeks at the start of each school year re-teaching material that students have forgotten.

Here are a few simple ways you can help your kids stay sharp while still keeping things fun.

Trade TV for reading - School's out for summer

Reading expands skills, allowing children to begin the school year with a better grasp of language and the world around them. It also enables them to discover the joy of reading. And, the more children like to read, the more they will read. When summer comes, they don't have to dive into textbooks; they can read whatever interests them – novels, newspapers, magazines or comic books. Just remember to balance sedentary time (reading) with active time (play).

Make the library or bookstore a favorite hangout by scheduling trips around events, such as book signings, story-time, writing groups, concerts and workshops.

Bring your child's friends along, challenge everyone to a read-off, and offer prizes to those kids who read the most books before school starts. **Brain-stimulating activities** promote learning and help ward off the familiar "I'm bored" whines.

Fun learning activities

- Create a dictionary.
- Write a movie script.
- Build a reading fort.
- Throw a bookthemed party.
- Create a comic book.
- Develop a theme song for your favorite book.
- Write a letter to your favorite author.
- Go to a book signing.
- Write a book together and have your own signing.
- Make a scrapbook on your safari through the state park.
- Interview local community members to learn about your neighborhood.
- Grow a pizza garden with tomatoes, herbs and veggies shaped in a circle.
- Start a new hobby.

Sleep schedule - School's out for summer

Make sure your children get enough sleep. No matter what the season, school-age kids and teens need an average of nine hours' sleep per night. Summer activities wreak havoc on **sleep patterns**.

The **sleep problems** that crop up can cause crankiness, learning difficulties and accidents, and can even make some children more prone to depression.

Better sleep means happier kids. Indulge your child with later bedtimes balanced with later wake-ups, but stick to a regular schedule to avoid disrupting **sleep patterns**.

Sticking to a sleep schedule helps ease your kids into the school-time sleep schedule, especially if you start at least a week before.

Young children have an easier time transitioning their sleep back in the fall; once puberty strikes, the ease of this shift comes to an abrupt halt. Pubertal changes in the sleep hormone melatonin encourage later sleep and wake-up times by shifting the circadian rhythm.

That's why, according to the National Sleep Foundation, it's tough to get your teen up in the morning, even after a full night's sleep. To help your child get more ZZZs, make sure he or she

avoids bright light at night (including computers and TVs), and brighten the morning wake-up with plenty of sunlight.

Food on hand - School's out for summer

Watch your kids' waistlines! The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that about 15 percent of children aged six to 19 are overweight, and summer picnics and barbecues can be as fattening as they are fun. Create tasty meals and snacks that can easily become fall favorites. Hold the mayo and try avocado in your tuna or chicken salad, or try switching to flavored mustards. Keep fruit salads in your refrigerator; go for berries and melon now, then apples with walnuts once school starts.

Pasta works anytime. Cold pasta salads are always ready, and older kids can quickly heat up spaghetti with sauce. Nonstick panini makers cook up great grilled cheese sandwiches and pocket pizzas without the need for greasing pans with added fat.

Trade the candy dish for a bowl filled with yogurt-covered raisins and nuts. But, what's summer without watermelon and ice cream? They just aren't the same come September, so allow some treats when the temperature soars.

Have those family dinners; just keep them simple so you can spend less time in the kitchen. Order healthy take-out, or better yet, make it a true family meal by having everyone help with the planning, cooking, and clean up, as well as the eating. You'll get so good at it that you'll be able to rev up family mealtime all year round!

Summertime play - School's out for summer

Most parents don't have the luxury of extended **summer vacations**, but you can still make time for your kids as the days get longer. Take day trips, go to the movies, walk around the neighborhood, take a bike tour, or simply relax at home.

Computer game play is okay, but keep it to a minimum, even though there's no homework. Instead, get your child out of the house. Active play fights obesity, stimulates thinking, aids in a good night's sleep, and is just plain fun.

Your child needs to play with friends to improve his or her relational and problem-solving skills. Summer is the perfect time to catch up on play, especially since many schools have decreased recess time or eliminated it altogether.

Childhood is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Once it's gone, it's gone. So let your child make the most of the lazy, hazy days of summer. Let him or her get dirty sliding into home plate, digging in the garden, or building castles in the sand.

Once summer slips away, your children (and you) can ease into the school year because you've all maintained a happy and healthy schedule during **summer break**. Be upbeat about the change – your enthusiasm will help make the shift back to school easier.

A restful night

Lavender has been clinically shown to help you fall asleep faster, sleep deeper and awake feeling more refreshed. See the Bath and Body Works range of lavender products at: www.bathandbodyworks.com

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