



healthy kids **NOW**

Take the *nip* out of frostbite

Children at play in winter may appear immune to the cold. But do not let rosy cheeks fool you. Children are at a greater risk than adults for frostbite since kids lose heat more quickly. Plus, they are less likely to head inside to warm up.

Frostbite happens when skin freezes due to prolonged exposure to cold temperatures. Children's hands, feet, nose, and ears are most vulnerable. And severe forms of frostbite can cause permanent damage to children's blood vessels, muscles, and bones.

For the best protection, try to keep children inside on severe winter days. Here are a few other prevention tips:

- Make sure children are dry from any recent baths or showers before going outside in cold weather.
- Dress your children in layers before letting them go outside.



Time check!
 Remember to call children inside periodically to warm up.

This will keep them warm and dry.

- Set time limits on outdoor play in cold weather. Also, call children inside periodically to warm up.
- Check for signs of frostbite on a regular basis. These include skin that appears pale, waxy, discolored, or hard. Your child also may complain of numbness or pain. If you see these symptoms, seek medical help immediately.

Sources: American Academy of Pediatrics; Sports Medicine;

American Medical Association; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; National Institutes of Health; University of Rochester; Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh; National Safety Council; Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research; Wilderness Environmental Medicine; National Safe Kids Campaign



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Are you having trouble paying your heating bills?
 Check out page 5 for more on the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program. This program can help you pay your heating bills if you are having trouble affording them.

Obesity's threats, and tips to tame them

Act to get rid of the extra pounds that can cause serious problems for kids.

You know obesity is bad for kids. But do you know just how bad? With nearly one in three children and teens overweight or obese, health problems that were once only seen in adults now show up in children. Kids who weigh too much also have a heightened risk for weight-related problems when they are adults.

Here are some key threats:

Heart disease

Researchers estimate three out of five overweight five- to 17-year-olds have at least one risk factor for heart and circulatory diseases. Those risk factors include:

- **ABNORMAL CHOLESTEROL.** Among 12- to 19-year-olds, surveys show 22 percent of the overweight and 43 percent of the obese have high levels of LDL (bad) cholesterol or triglycerides (blood fats) or low levels of HDL (good) cholesterol.
- **HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE.** In a study of more than 5,000 Texas children ages 10 to 19, 5 percent had high blood pressure. The strongest risk factor was obesity.
- **METABOLIC SYNDROME.** This collection of risk factors includes insulin resistance, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and other problems. Up to half of severely obese adolescents have metabolic syndrome, which increases the odds for heart disease, diabetes, and stroke.

Other diseases

Other problems linked to children's increased weight include:

- **DIABETES:** Type 2 diabetes, once rare among children, has risen dramatically.
- **ASTHMA:** This common lung disease causes breathing difficulty.
- **LIVER PROBLEMS:** Extra weight causes fatty degeneration of the liver, or hepatic steatosis.

- **SLEEP APNEA:** Breathing stops repeatedly during sleep for at least 10 seconds.

Social problems

Overweight children often have fewer friends and face teasing about their weight. Social discrimination and isolation can lead to stress and low self-esteem that linger into adulthood.

Their progress in school and on the job may suffer — and they may be prone to anxiety and depression.

How you can help

Ask your pediatrician if your child's weight is in a healthy range. If not, these tips can help:

- Offer children reasonable portions of well-balanced meals low in fat and sugar.
- Set specific snack times to discourage constant munching. Stock healthy snacks, such as fruit, veggies, or plain popcorn.
- Limit the amount of sugar-filled beverages you give your child.
- Add exercise, such as hiking, to weekends and vacations. Help your child find physical activities that he or she enjoys.
- Limit "screen time" to two hours or less. That includes television, computers, and video games. Experts say that this time could be better spent being physically active.
- Practice what you preach. Children imitate their parents. If you eat well and stay physically active, your children are more likely to do the same.

Sources: National Institutes of Health; American Family Physician; American Heart Association; National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases; Office of the Surgeon General; Pediatrics; Circulation; Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report; Journal of the American Medical Association; Journal of Pediatrics; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute



Backpackers beware: School load can cause injury, pain



Homework can cause any child to feel weighed down. But if your child goes off to school lugging a backpack overloaded with textbooks, binders, and other supplies, he may be shouldering a load that actually could hurt his back. And over time, too much weight on a young back can lead to serious problems, such as scoliosis (curvature of the spine).

How much is too much?

Experts recommend that students carry only 10 percent to 15 percent of their body weight on their back. For instance, a child who weighs 100 pounds should carry about a 10- to 15-pound backpack. But most students carry much more than this amount every day. In fact, studies show that more than 75 percent of children complain their school

backpacks are too heavy — and as many as 30 percent already have developed a history of back pain.

Time to do your homework

Lift your child's burden of a heavy backpack by making sure his backpack is designed to minimize back pain. For example, your child's pack should have:

- wide, padded shoulder straps
- a padded back
- a waist or chest belt
- compartments for distributing weight evenly

It is also important to lighten the load. Encourage your child to carry only the supplies he needs for a particular day and to leave the extra “stuff” in his locker, desk, or at home.

Here are some other important tips:

- Place heavier items in the back of the pack.

- When your child puts on his backpack, be sure to have him bend at his knees and lift with his legs.
- Position your child's backpack on both shoulders and make sure it rides at the height of his waist or hip.
- Find out if your child's school allows rolling backpacks. Some schools discourage their use because they can be a tripping hazard.
- Call your child's doctor if he has back pain that lasts for more than a few days or gets worse.

Sources: Musculoskeletal Disorders; American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons; American Academy of Pediatrics; American Journal of Public Health; American Academy of Family Physicians; Spine, Ergonomics; Early Human Development



Q&A: How much sleep does my teenager need?

While adults need seven to nine hours every night, research suggests that teens need between 8.5 to 9.5 hours a night to stay healthy. But busy schedules, late-night TV, computers, caffeine, and early school starting times may keep teens from getting the rest they need.

If your teen has trouble concentrating, can not stay alert in school, nods off when reading, or has a short fuse, sleep deprivation may be the problem. (The symptoms may even be mistaken for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.) Make sure your teen's bedroom is dark, quiet, and comfortable for sleeping. Establish a routine for going to bed and waking at the same time every day. If these steps do not help, talk with your teen's doctor.

Source: National Sleep Foundation

Skip the burger and feel better

What does your child want for lunch? If he or she is like many other kids, the first answer might be a burger and fries. But that may not be the best choice.

Some scientists looked at what kids ate all around the world. Those who often ate burgers were more likely to get asthma. But kids who ate fish, fruit, and veggies were less likely to get it.

Why are burgers bad for asthma? It could be because of

the unhealthy fat in fast food like burgers and fries.

Power up your body

Healthy food choices help children feel and do their best. Food is the fuel that powers your kids' bodies. With the right fuel, they have more energy to learn and play. A balanced diet also helps them grow and build strong muscles and bones. Plus, it helps their bodies stay at a healthy weight.

When your child has asthma, a good diet helps the lungs work better. It decreases swelling inside the airways. It reduces the risk for wheezing — a whistling sound that some kids with asthma make when breathing.

Supersize your health

Now here's the really good news: Healthy food can still taste great!

The following smart choices are delicious, nutritious, and fun.

Have your children help you prepare these tasty treats:

- **BERRY GOOD SMOOTHIE.** Put 1 cup unsweetened orange juice, ½ banana (sliced), ¼ cup frozen strawberries, and two ice cubes in a blender. Blend until smooth. Makes two servings.
- **ANY DAY SUNDAE.** Top low-fat yogurt with fruit and crunchy whole-grain cereal. For the fruit, try sliced apples, peaches, or strawberries. Or use whole blueberries instead.
- **SNACKER CRACKERS.** Make little sandwiches from whole-grain crackers. Fill with peanut butter or almond butter and 100 percent fruit spread — this is the kind with no added sugar.

DID YOU KNOW?

Good news for parents: More than half of all children with asthma will outgrow symptoms by the end of their teenage years. This is especially true for boys and for children with mild cases of the disease.

- **ON-THE-GO TRAIL MIX.** Combine dried fruit, nuts, and mini-pretzels. Put a handful in a zip-top bag for an easy-to-carry snack.
- **LITTLE DIPPERS.** Stir a package of dry ranch dressing mix into 1 cup of plain low-fat yogurt. Serve with raw carrot sticks, bell pepper strips, or cauliflower pieces.
- **¡QUE BUENO! QUESADILLA.** Sprinkle grated low-fat cheese and cut-up peppers and mushrooms over a whole-wheat tortilla. Spread on low-fat refried beans for extra flavor. Cover with another tortilla. Microwave.
- **MEAL IN A POCKET.** Fill a whole-wheat pita pocket with hummus, shredded lettuce, cut-up tomatoes, and sliced cucumber.
- **TOO GOOD TUNA SALAD.** Mix canned light tuna with chopped carrots and celery. Stir in a little low-fat or fat-free mayonnaise. Spread on a whole wheat roll, or spoon into celery sticks.

Sources: National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Respiratory Research; Thorax; American Heart Association; National Institutes of Health; Acta Paediatrica

Hidden sugars: Are they harming your health?

Call it corn sweetener or high-fructose corn syrup — it is still sugar by any other name.

Sugars occur naturally in foods such as fruit and milk. However, most of the sugar in our diets comes from added sugars. They have been mixed into soft drinks, desserts, fruit drinks, jams, and breads, among other places. Our bodies don't need sweets to work properly, so these extra sugars provide calories without nutrients.

Sugar's effects: Not so sweet

Recent research suggests the health effects of added sugars stretch beyond obesity. Consuming too much sugar has been linked to high triglycerides, high blood pressure, fat around your organs, and other risk factors for heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

Much of the news about sugar has focused on fructose, especially high-fructose corn syrup. Some research shows these sugars cause additional problems with blood pressure and cholesterol and leave you craving more. But

most scientists say they're no more harmful than any other sweetener.

De-sugar your diet

The bottom line? Keeping extra sugar of all kinds out of your child's diet can protect his or her waistline — and heart.

The upper limit of added sugar for each person varies. But in general, women should drink or eat no more than 100 calories (six teaspoons) a day from added sugar. Men should have no more than 150 calories (nine teaspoons) a day. These guidelines are used only by the American Heart Association and they are geared just toward adults. But they serve as a helpful measure of how much to limit sugar intake.

The average American child gets about 360 calories from sugar each day. To curb your child's intake:

Read nutrition labels. Check the number of sugar grams. There are four calories in each sugar gram. Compare brands. Avoid those that put honey, corn or maple syrup, or words that end

in “-ose” (like fructose or sucrose) at the top of the ingredient list.

When baking, cut sugar by one-third to one-half. Your child probably will not notice the difference. If you put sugar on your child's cereal, cut that amount by one-half.

Buy fresh fruits or ones canned with water or natural juice, not syrup.

Pick water over soda.

Reach for the spice jar. Ginger, nutmeg, and cinnamon — along with extracts like vanilla and almond — provide flavor with less calories.

Sources: Current Hypertension Reports; Journal of the American Dietetic Association; American Journal of Physiology, Endocrinology, and Metabolism; Nutrition; Nutrition & Metabolism; Journal of the American Dietetic Association; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; American Heart Association; National Institutes of Health



Need some help with your heating bill?

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) helps low-income families pay their heating bills. It is a grant — you do not have to repay it. To receive help:

- You do not have to be on public assistance
- You do not need to have an unpaid heating bill
- You can either rent or own your home

How do I apply?

You can apply online — or learn more — at www.compass.state.pa.us. You can request an application by calling the local Philadelphia LIHEAP hotline at **215-560-1583** or toll-free at **1-866-857-7095**. Applications are also available at your local county assistance office.



Cell phones for 'tweens? You make the call

At what age do you say yes to your child's request for a cell phone? A lot of parents have long since acknowledged that cell phones are a staple of teen life, but what about eight- to 12-year-olds?

That they want one is obvious. Whether they need one is debatable.

Giving your 'tween a cell phone is an "option of choice and should come with a set of responsibilities," says Deborah Mulligan, M.D., past president of the Florida chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Many parents are saying yes. More than 6 million 'tweens have their own cell phones. The wireless industry is answering the call, as it were, with colorful, kid-sized phones that have features aimed at preteens.

Is eight a reasonable age to own a cell phone? And if so, what problems should you foresee? The decision can be emotionally charged, raising issues of safety, stature, and status.

Kids want cell phones because they look cool, they imply a degree of maturity, and they convey status. Perhaps most important, phones let them stay in near-constant touch with friends.

Of course, having a cell phone also forces kids to stay in touch with parents. Some phones even include a tracking feature.

Parents who say yes to cell phones need to talk with their kids about:

- using good cell phone etiquette
- guarding themselves from exploitation, bullying, and invasion of their privacy
- avoiding out-of-control calling and text messaging that can lead to painful phone bills

In some cases, says Dr. Mulligan, parents must use "old-fashioned parental authority to say no." It's up to you to make this call.

Sources: American Academy of Pediatrics; New York University Child Study Center; Jan Faull; MSN.com; Mulligan, Deborah, M.D., past president of the Florida chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Is your teen tangled in the Web?

For some kids, the Internet is like a drug. Here are some signs that your teen's habit is worrisome:

- Your child sleeps less to surf the 'Net.
- He or she feels the need to stay online for longer and longer periods of time.
- Internet usage has hurt his or her school performance.
- Your child met most of his or her current friends online and socializes mainly by use of the computer.
- Your child constantly anticipates his or her next online session.

If you think your child may be hooked, a counselor can help him or her overcome the addiction and any other related problems.

Sources: American Journal of Orthopsychiatry; WebMD; Center for On-Line Addiction; American Academy of Pediatrics; American Psychological Association; Center for Internet Studies; Addictive Behaviors; Journal of Affective Disorders; Psychological Reports; Illinois Institute for Addiction Recovery

Dental corner: Some friendly flossing advice

Does your child brush his or her teeth twice a day? Great! That is a great start to good oral health — but keep in mind that it is just a start. Brushing teeth will not do the complete job — flossing can help your child reach areas that a toothbrush can not, such as under the gum line or between teeth.

Is your child wondering about the right way to floss?

1. Choose a kind of dental floss that your child would prefer. Waxed floss usually slides a little easier than unwaxed floss. If in doubt, speak with your child's dentist.
2. Tell your child to wrap 18 inches of dental floss loosely

around his or her middle fingers until there is about 2 inches left between the fingers.

3. Instruct your child to hold the floss firmly between the thumbs and index fingers. He or she should gently slide the floss into a “C-shape” up-and-down between the teeth, working it beneath the gum line on both sides.
4. Your child should move to a clean section of floss and repeat until he or she has cleaned around each tooth.

It is a good idea to work with your dentist to make sure you and your child are flossing correctly.

Sources: American Dental Association



Important CHIP information

Website

Visit www.caringfoundation.com and click on CHIP for a host of information. For example, you can look up a participating provider, view a benefits handbook (click the For Members tab), or link to the PA Insurance Department at www.chipcoverspakids.com.

Renewal

The Caring Foundation verifies children's eligibility for CHIP once each year. Your child's renewal form will be mailed to your home every year, 90 days before the anniversary of enrollment. To avoid your child's coverage being cancelled, it is extremely important that you complete the renewal form and return it to the Caring Foundation as soon as possible.

There are three ways to renew:

- Go to www.compass.state.pa.us and submit your child's renewal information online.



- Call **1-800-986-5437** and renew by phone.
- Complete the form you receive in the mail and return it to the Caring Foundation.

In all cases, you must sign the signature page and mail it back, along with copies of your current income documentation.

Keeping your information current

If we can't reach you, you may miss out on important information like your child's annual renewal, or worse, risk losing your child's coverage. Please keep us informed if you change your address or telephone number.

Spread the word

Do you know of an uninsured child who needs health insurance, but his or her parents cannot afford to purchase private insurance? They can contact us at **1-800-464-5437**.



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Protect your child against the flu

An annual flu shot is the best way to prevent the flu. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends an annual flu vaccine for all people ages six months and older.

Currently, the CDC recommends annual shots for all children, starting at six months and continuing every year thereafter. In addition, children ages six months to younger than nine years who previously have not received flu shots should get two doses of the flu vaccine.

The best time to get the shot is in October or November — before the flu season typically starts. **But you still can get one from December through March.**

Besides a flu shot, handwashing is a great way to help avoid the



flu. Your child should lather up with soap and water and scrub for about 20 seconds. That is about the time it takes to sing the “Happy Birthday” song. Remind your child not to forget the back of the hands, between the fingers, and under the nails. When soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based sanitizing hand gel.

If your child comes down with a flu-like illness, make sure that he or she gets plenty of rest and fluids. Flu symptoms include headache, fever, sore throat, muscle aches, dry cough, and fatigue.

Sources: Medscape Medical News; U.S. Food and Drug Administration; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report