

## Healthwatch: Back to School

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The following are some helpful tips for parents sending their children back to school (excerpts in part from *American Academy of Pediatrics "Back to School Tips"*):

### Easing the First-Day-of-School Jitters:

- Remind your child that she is not the only student who is uneasy about the first day of school. Teachers know that students are anxious and will make an extra effort to make sure everyone feels as comfortable as possible.
- Point out the positive aspects of starting school. Refresh her positive memories of previous years.
- Introduce your child to someone attending the same school, or find another child in the neighborhood who can walk with your child to the school bus.

### Lighten the Load:

- Choose a backpack with wide, padded shoulder straps and a padded back.
- Pack light. The backpack should never weigh more than 10-20% of the child's weight (a 50 pound child's backpack should weigh less than 10 pounds).
- Always use both straps. Slings a backpack over one shoulder can strain muscles.
- Consider a rolling backpack for those students who must carry a heavier load.

### Brain Food:

- Avoid a breakfast of simple sugars (sugary cereal, Poptarts, etc).
- Be sure to include protein in the breakfast meal...milk, yogurt, eggs, or whole grains. Protein keeps the brain energized with fuel and helps keep blood sugars level, avoiding those sugar lows which can cause behavioral problems and difficulty focusing. If your child does not like to eat breakfast, encourage at least a high protein meal replacement bar or beverage (PediaSure, Boost, etc), or a glass of milk.
- When packing her lunch, allow your child a choice from healthy food options...she'll be more apt to eat her lunch if she helped pack it.
- Encourage your child to avoid sugar laden beverages. Choose 100% fruit juice or water. Even sports drinks are not a healthy option except when used for hydration during exercise.

### Habits to Study:

- Create an environment that is conducive to doing homework (TV should be OFF!).
- Set aside ample time for homework.
- Supervise computer and internet use.
- Be available to answer questions and help but resist doing their homework for them.
- If your child has difficulty focusing, consider setting timed increments (ie, 15 minutes) to work on each assignment. Include short, timed breaks when your child loses focus or looks fatigued.

### Keep Them Out of the Nurse's Office:

- Healthy diets and adequate sleep are important in keeping kids immune systems strong.
- Remind them when and how to wash their hands and to avoid putting fingers, or other objects in their mouth.
- Teach them to cover their cough and use a tissue (not sleeve, finger, etc) to wipe their nose.
- If your child does become ill, she should be fever free (without help of fever reducers) for 24 hrs. before returning to school.