



Danielle Villar
Health and Wellness Chair
healthwellness@suffolkpta.org

Report for September 2021

Healthy Habits for a Successful Back to School Season for Families

Amid all the buzz back to school brings, from finding out which teachers your children have and who is in their class, to back to school shopping, come the groans of transitioning back to an early start to the day, families everywhere can take this opportunity to work healthy habits into the school and extracurricular schedules. This year more than ever as NYS schools head back to in-person learning, it is really important we find different ways to support our students since they have bore the brunt of the pandemic.

Rather than choosing to focus on what we can't control, however, let's stay focused on what we can do so that our kids feel more normal and safer at school, have the space needed to be outspoken when necessary, and let go of the rest.

Have a playdate with a peer - Hosting a playdate or two with your child's peers, preferably a new classmate, can serve as a two-for-one in helping ease your child's fears about not knowing anyone at school and slowly reintroducing them back to social situations. With the end of summer and the beautiful temperatures of fall, a play date at a local park is a great way to meet and stay outside.

Communicate, communicate, communicate - It doesn't have to be fancy, but carve out time to really talk with your child about the return to school. Talk about what they can expect from school, what happens if they get scared, who they can talk to if they need, and what fears they have.

Don't create fear - The truth is, they don't need every ongoing detail about the pandemic. They need us to be their place of peace. Even if they haven't been able to express it—we all know their worlds have been turned upside down and shows them that their parents don't always have the answers.

Sign out social media and get outside - It has been shown that spending too much time on social media platforms can have detrimental effects on our children's psychological health. The fall is a great time to spend more time outside. The leaves are bright on the trees, and the temperature is generally moderate, providing a wonderful opportunity for sports, family walks, and picnics. Spending time outside improves your mental health and sun exposure bolsters vitamin D levels which helps prevent infections.

Amp up your immune system - Hydrate with tons of water throughout the day, and your immune system will thank you. The foods you eat will also provide vital micronutrients and vitamins. Yogurt, with all its probiotics, has been shown to boost the immune system, and kale is considered one of the most nutrient dense vegetables due to its vitamins, minerals and antioxidants. Another immunity booster? An autumn favorite: pumpkins. They're high in beta carotene, which your body converts into vitamin A. In turn, vitamin A helps strengthen your immune system.

Consume in-season veggies - Wondering what foods to incorporate to help boost your immune system before hunkering down indoors during the cold winter months? Fall vegetables include:

- Beets

- Brussels sprouts
- Cabbage
- Carrots
- Cauliflower
- Eggplant
- Kale
- Squash

An abundance of tasty autumn vegetables makes it easy to reap their benefits such as diabetes prevention, hypertension control, heart health, and more. Consider roasting fall veggies with just a little oil, salt and pepper.

To learn more about how to access healthy affordable food options, please visit the NYS Health Foundation Building Healthy Communities website to find out where in your neighborhood you can access:

<https://nyshealthfoundation.org/what-we-fund/building-healthy-communities/healthy-affordable-food/>

Do absolutely nothing at all - This might sound like it goes against everything you want to do as a parent who likes to prepare and plan, but it's important. Find time to make space for you and your kids to just have fun. Have a family connect night 1x/month! Remember that play always has a purpose. Play is how kids (and even adults) learn and practice their social and emotional skills. It increases children's creativity and problem-solving abilities, and will help them refill the psychological resources they need for the school year ahead.