

BACK TO

It's August, and although your kids are still swimming, skating, playing softball, soccer and soaking up the summer sun, the days are getting shorter, and your thoughts turn to purchasing backpacks and binders, and helping anxious kids adjust to a new school year.

"Don't be surprised if your seemingly calm, well-adjusted children begin to have trouble sleeping, temper tantrums or mysterious headaches or stomach aches," cautions **Mike Bleiman, MD**, chairman of the Department of Pediatrics at SOCH. "It's all part of the anxiety that comes with the impending start of school."

According to Dr. Bleiman, there are things you can do to make the first day of school easier for your elementary school-age children. Remind your children that they are not the only students who will feel a bit uneasy about the first day. Assure them that teachers will make an extra effort to make sure everyone feels as comfortable as possible. Tell them about the positive aspects of starting school. They will have fun, and see old friends. You might also want to consider walking or driving your children to school to help relieve those first day jitters.

While kids might fret about having to do home work again and making new friends, moms and dads worry about their kids' safety on the school bus, their eating habits, and their risk for getting sick.

"When children are back in the classroom, in an enclosed environment with other kids, it is a breeding ground for germs," said Dr. Bleiman, who says that colds and fever are common at the start of school. "Handwashing before and after every meal

SCHOOL

HEALTH and SAFETY TIPS

is one of the best ways to avoid getting sick."

If children do get sick, Dr. Bleiman encourages parents to keep them home to give them time to recover and to avoid the possibility of infecting the other kids. If symptoms persist more than 24 hours, he suggests parents call their physician.

Another way to keep kids healthy is to ensure they eat the right foods.

"A proper diet can help your kids stay healthy and give them the energy they need to tackle the school day," said Dr. Bleiman. "Pack healthy foods, such as whole-grain or multi-grain snacks, and avoid fruit juices that don't have much nutritional value, but are loaded with calories."

Dr. Bleiman also recommends fresh fruit, low-fat dairy products and plenty of water. Avoid soft drinks, which contain approximately 10 teaspoons of sugar and 150 calories. Drinking just one glass a day increases a child's risk of obesity by 60 percent.

Most schools provide schedules of cafeteria menus. With this advance information, you can pre-pack lunch on the days when the main course is something you don't want your children to eat.

If your children walk to school, make sure they take a safe route with well-trained, adult crossing guards at every intersection. In addition, Dr. Bleiman recommends children wear brightly colored clothing that will make them more visible to drivers.

If your children take the bus to school, Dr. Bleiman suggests you review these basic rules:

- Wait for the bus to stop before approaching it from the curb
- Do not move around on the bus
- Check to see that no other traffic is coming before crossing
- Make sure to always remain in clear view of the bus driver

"Older kids who bike to school should always wear a helmet, no matter how short the ride may be" stressed Dr. Bleiman. "Kids should ride on the right, in the same direction as auto traffic, respect traffic lights and stop signs and know the rules of the road."

When the long school day is over, it is tempting for kids to park themselves in front of the TV for hours on end. "A sedentary lifestyle contributes to obesity in children," said Dr. Bleiman. "Encourage kids to be active. They can play organized sports, or just run or ride their bike outside. The important thing is that they are getting the exercise that they need."

Finally, getting your children to tackle their homework doesn't have to be a daily battle. Set aside ample time for homework, in a quiet area of the house that offers privacy and no TV! Be available to answer questions and offer assistance, but let your children do the work.

Going back to school can be a fun and exciting time of year for your kids, and by following these tips they can also remain healthy and safe!

For referral to a *pediatric specialist* at SOCH, call **SOCHConnect** at 609-978-3400.



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