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# Newsletter

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## Good Posture Starts Early

We've all heard, "Sit up straight!" more than once, usually while sitting in a classroom many years ago. Posture was not taught, it was demanded. In an effort to weigh the possible benefits of back education, a group of researchers led a two school-year study of Belgian schoolchildren that concluded positive immediate and long-term results.

The study involved more than 350 9- to 11-year-old children. The program consisted of lessons on good posture, positive reinforcement from their teachers and the addition of exercise balls and sitting wedges in each class. The students, under the supervision of their teachers, were evaluated with a pre- and post-test that included 10 questions on the content of the lessons, a section on general posture knowledge, and an evaluation of back and neck pain in the previous week. In addition, three children in each class were randomly selected for observation of their posture.

Results showed that students who received back education showed increased back posture knowledge, improved posture, and a decrease in how often they sat with their backs bent forward and their necks craned at school.

Are your children aware of the benefits of proper posture and how to achieve it? If you aren't already doing so, now's the time to take them to an expert on appropriate care of the back: your chiropractor.

Visit [www.chiroweb.com/find/archives/musculoskeletal](http://www.chiroweb.com/find/archives/musculoskeletal) to learn more about the essentials of good posture and musculoskeletal health.

Geldhof E, Cardon G, Bourdeaudhuij I, et al. Effects of a two-school-year multifactorial back education program in elementary schoolchildren. *Spine* 2006;31(17):1965-1973.

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## Back-to-School Sleep Schedule Should Begin

The National Sleep Foundation is suggesting U.S. parents and their children start adjusting their sleep schedules before school begins.

"Although it's tempting to sleep as late as possible during the remaining days of summer, it's not necessarily the best strategy for starting the school year off right," says Richard L. Gelula, NSF's chief executive officer. "In fact, a lack of sleep seriously affects academic performance, mood and a teenager's ability to drive safely."

To get students back to an early-to-bed, early-to-rise regime, the NSF recommends setting a limit for the latest bedtime and wake-up time and then gradually move these times earlier -- in 15-minute increments every other day, time permitting -- as the school year approaches.

Gelula also suggests having children do outdoor activities in the morning instead of in the evenings as school approaches.

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## People Judge Others in a Tenth of Second

When people see a new face, their brains decide whether a person is attractive and trustworthy within a tenth of a second, finds a U.S. study. Princeton University psychologist Alex Todorov found that people respond intuitively to faces so rapidly that their reasoning minds may not have time to influence the reaction and that intuitions about attraction and trust are among those formed the fastest. "The link between facial features and character may be tenuous at best, but that doesn't stop our minds from sizing other people up at a glance," said Todorov. "We decide quickly whether a person possesses many of the traits we feel are important, such as likeability and competence, even though we have not exchanged a single word with them. It appears that we are hard-wired to draw these inferences in a fast, unreflective way." Todorov asked about 200 people to look at 66 different faces for 100 milliseconds, 500 milliseconds or a full second and judge trustworthiness. "We found, if given more time, people's fundamental judgment about faces did not change," Todorov said. "Observers simply became more confident in their judgments as the duration lengthened." The findings are published in the journal *Psychological Science*.

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## Backpacks Should Weight Less Than 15 Pounds

An expert at Cedars-Sinai Institute for Spinal Disorders and Orthopedic Center in Los Angeles says student backpacks should weigh less than 15 pounds. "While backpacks are considered the most efficient way to carry books and other items kids need for school, it's important they weigh less than 15 percent of a child's body weight," says Dr. Leonel Hunt, director of the center. "Otherwise, over time, a child can experience back pain and soreness that can lead to problems that may require medical treatment." Compared to satchels or briefcases, backpacks are considered safer because they distribute weight evenly across the body and are supported by the back and abdominal muscles. However, more than 50 percent of children surveyed carry backpacks that are too heavy. "When a backpack is filled with heavy books and incorrectly positioned, the weight's force can pull your child backward," said Hunt. "To compensate, your child may bend forward at the hips or arch his or her back, causing the spine to compress unnaturally, and this can lead to shoulder, neck and back pain."

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## Naps Play Vital Role in Babies' Learning

University of Arizona research shows that babies' naps are important, and not just for resting -- they hone the infants' abilities to learn. Psychologists Rebecca Gomez, Richard Bootzin, and Lynn Nadel found that babies who got a little daytime shut-eye were more likely to exhibit an advanced level of learning, known as abstraction. The researchers played recordings of "phrases" from an artificial language to 48 15-month-old infants during a learning session until the babies became familiar with them. These phrases contained three units, with the first and last unit forming a relationship. Even though these are nonsensical sounds, the language shares some similarity with structure found in English sentences. The infants who did not sleep recognized the phrases they had learned earlier, but the babies who had slept in between lessons generalized their knowledge of the predictive relationships to new phrases, according to the study published in *Psychological Science*. Gomez interprets this as evidence that napping supports abstract learning -- the ability to detect a general pattern in new information.

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## High Heels Can Be Hazardous to Women

Women more than men pay a high price for fashion in today's style conscious society when it comes to shoes, says a British expert. Typically narrow in the toe, many high-heeled shoes do not allow for proper space and movement of the toes which can lead to the formation of bunions or neuromas.

Studies have shown that a 2-inch heel can cause seven times more stress on the body than a one-inch heel. The height of the heel alters the balanced position of a woman's body by increasing the normal forward curve of the body and causing the pelvis to tip forward. Dr. Rupert Evans, an accident and emergency doctor at University Hospital of Wales in Cardiff, tells the BBC very high heels have resulted in more injuries. He recommends a 1.5-inch heel to avoid a trip to hospital.

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## Families Should Create Disaster Plans

It is imperative to consider the physical and emotional needs of U.S. children during and after a disaster, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics. As the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina approaches, the AAP is encouraging families, pediatricians and communities to prepare for potential natural and other disasters, because children are especially vulnerable during and after disasters.

Parents can create a family disaster plan by:

- Talking with children about the dangers of disasters common to the area and how to prepare for each type.
- Teach children how to recognize danger signals and ensure they know what smoke detectors, fire alarms and local community warning systems -- horns and sirens -- sound like and what to do when they hear them.
- Explain to children how and when to call for help and keep emergency phone numbers handy.
- Agree on a meeting place away from home -- a neighbor or street corner -- where family members could gather if separated in an emergency.
- Include pets in the family disaster plan.

Because of children's developmental limitations, they are often unable to express their needs and rely on adults to help them identify and express their concerns, says the AAP.

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## Restaurant Noise Can Hurt Hearing

Some U.S. restaurants are so noisy that customers' and employees' hearing can be hurt over time, according to a Purdue University audiologist. Loud restaurants can also become impossible places for people with hearing loss to visit with friends and families, says Robert Novak, a clinical professor of audiology. "There are roughly 25-plus million people with significant hearing loss, and that number is on the increase with the aging of the baby boomer population," Novak says.

"Eating out may be one of the few opportunities older people have to socialize with others, and I am concerned that some of these noisy environments will keep people away from the important relationships in their lives." People should be able to have a conversation when three feet apart without shouting or asking for frequent repetition, and if they can't, the environment is too loud or it is possible that one or both people could have a hearing problem and should make an appointment with an audiologist, advises Novak.

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## Survey: Seniors Take Health Over Bucks

Health is a bigger priority for seniors than other concerns like wealth, according to a new survey. Nearly 70% of seniors polled said they were concerned about their health and well-being, compared to 52% who expressed concern about personal finance, according to a national poll of individuals ages 63 to 80 by United Health Group's Senior Security Study. As a result, more seniors are being proactive in staying informed about their healthcare, the survey found. Eighty percent of seniors reported that they keep up-to-date on the latest health news, 43% from doctors and 25 percent from the Internet. Nearly six out of 10 seniors are concerned about staying mentally sharp, but less than half say they are concerned about maintaining social relationships.

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## Sunlight Helps Fight Disease, Bone Loss

Bright sunshine does more than lift your spirits; it also stimulates your body to produce huge amounts of vitamin D, say U.S. experts. Often called the "sunshine vitamin," vitamin D is not really a vitamin at all, but rather a versatile hormone produced by the body in response to sunlight. When a person is exposed to the sun, a cascade of chemical reactions begins in the skin and converts vitamin D produced in the skin into the active form of vitamin D through further modification in the liver and kidneys, according to Roswell Park Cancer Institute researchers Dr. Donald Trump and Candace Johnson. Researchers have known for a long time that vitamin D helps the body absorb calcium to build strong bones and teeth, but it also helps to strengthen the immune system and seems to protect against some types of cancers and as well as other diseases. Some studies indicate that vitamin D may help prevent cancer of the breast, colon, ovaries and prostate. A recent report indicated those individuals with higher levels of vitamin D in the blood had as much as a 50 percent lower cancer risk of many types for cancer.

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## Children Drink More Soft Drinks Than Milk

U.S. children aged six to 19-years-old consume significantly more ounces of soft drinks each day than milk or juice, says the American Dental Association. For example, teenage boys and girls are drinking twice as much soft drinks as milk, and a third of teenage boys drink at least three cans of soda a day, according to the ADA. "When teeth come in frequent contact with sweetened soft drinks and other sugar-containing substances, the risk of tooth decay, which is the most common childhood disease, is increased as is the potential for erosion of tooth enamel," said Kimberly Harms, a dentist with the ADA. "Kids and teens are more susceptible to decay from soft drinks because their tooth enamel is not fully developed." Sweetened drinks are the primary source of added sugar in the daily diet of children -- each 12-ounce serving of a carbonated, sweetened soft drink contains the equivalent of 10 teaspoons of sugar, according to Dr. Renee Jenkins, vice president of the American Academy of Pediatrics. "Not only should parents be discouraging their children from drinking soda, but they can set a good example by choosing to drink healthier alternatives themselves," she adds.

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## Secondhand Smoke Injures Babies' Lungs

U.S. researchers have described in unprecedented biochemical and anatomical detail how cigarette smoke damages the lungs of unborn and newborn children.

“Smoke exposure causes significant damage and lasting consequences in newborns,” Kent Pinkerton, of the University of California at Davis. “This research has a message for every parent: Do not smoke or breathe secondhand smoke while you are pregnant. Do not let your children breathe secondhand smoke after they are born.”

The researchers found environmental tobacco smoke wreaks havoc in babies at a critical time in the development of lungs -- when millions of alveoli are being formed. Alveoli are where oxygen passes from the lungs into the bloodstream. Human infants are born with only about one-fifth of the 300 million alveoli they will need as adults. They construct almost all the rest between birth and age 8.

In healthy people, cells live and die on a schedule known as apoptosis, but the researchers found that when baby monkeys were exposed to cigarette smoke before and after birth, apoptosis went awry. Critical cellular controls regulating cell death turned off. Alveolar cells died twice as fast as they should have, according to the study published in the American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine.

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