



By Julie Jacobs

With the lazy, hazy days of summer vacation soon to be behind us, thoughts turn to the halls of academia. Yes, it's back-to-school time—back to regular bedtimes, packed lunches and homework. To help prepare you and your kids for the coming year, we've culled advice from Overlook experts on a range of topics, from getting enough sleep to staying safe on the way to and from school.

GOT THEIR SHOTS?

Providing your children's health information is your first "assignment" for school. Immunizations should be up to date to protect both your own kids and those around them. Any chronic conditions such as asthma or allergies should be brought to the attention of the school nurse and the teacher. Also worth mentioning are any recurring sprains, previous fractures or other orthopedic problems, especially if your child will be active in sports. When medication must be taken during school, speak with the nurse who will administer it and apprise the teacher of any potential side effects.

DAILY "ZZZZS"

Sleep not only reinvigorates the body, but the brain, too. In fact, some researchers think that sleep allows the brain to sort information and problem-solve—both critical functions for learning. Most experts agree that children between ages 5 and 12 need 10 to 11 hours of sleep nightly; for teens, nine hours are sufficient.

The goal before school begins is to shift back your child's biological clock, or natural timing system, that indicates when to go to bed and when to wake up. "Fortunately, most kids are able to adjust to the school sleep schedule," says Federico Cerrone, MD, director of the Sleep Center at Overlook Hospital. He advises starting the adjustment about one week before school begins. "Have your child go to sleep a half hour earlier every night, but get up at the same time the next morning."

Also, keep them from engaging in stimulating activities like playing video games or watching television right before bedtime. Implement relaxing routines that can involve reading or listening to soft music. Children should avoid caffeine,

A Back-to-School Health Checkup