

PARENTING by Leslie Fuller Knox

Healthy Kids

Adopt these five simple steps to help your children maintain a

From the moment you bring home your child, you want to safeguard your son or daughter's health. But parents face a barrage of confusing — even frightening — messages about the best way to fulfill this challenging mission.

However, Dr. Marilyn J. Bull, president of the Indiana chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, says health-savvy parents can use the following strategies to protect their children:

Find a "medical home"

"You want to make sure you and your child have a medical home, where you feel comfortable, they know you and you can have continuity of care," Bull says. "Busy families may be tempted to go to that retail clinic — 'doc in the box' — as we call it. Well, they may treat your sore throat, but may not follow up on all the issues."

A trusted pediatrician can empower parents by interpreting the latest medical studies, such as one indicating cardiac risks for some young Ritalin patients. "A health provider you trust can discuss these issues with you," she says.

Know the baselines and guidelines

"You want to stay up to date and follow general guidelines because we're learning more everyday," Bull says. She recommends parents visit www.brightfutures.aap.org for resources, including a "periodicity" chart to track their children's development and needs.

Much preventive medicine is age-dependent, changing as your child grows. For instance, many parents know newborns can sleep 20 to 22 hours, but they may not realize that teens need 10 to 12 hours of shut-eye, Bull says. Once parents know how much sleep their kids need, they know when to call their pediatrician, who can order a sleep study, if necessary, she says.

Set a healthy table

"Stop what you're doing three days a week



and have a family meal," Bull says. Several things happen around the dinner table, she notes. This is a time when parents model healthful eating, which includes fruit and vegetables. Also, it's a chance to "debrief" your children about what's going on in their lives at school and the community. This gives

parents valuable insights about their child's energy level, social development and happiness. And speaking of energy levels, "don't go out without eating breakfast," she adds.

Know both parents' family histories

Parents knowledgeable about their own

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family histories have information that can help their children's physician, Bull says. For example, that petite son or slow-to-talk daughter may be a late bloomer who will catch up later, just like Mom or Dad. Likewise, a family history of allergies or specific medical complaints can be important for parents to keep in mind as they monitor their own children.

“ I don't hope that she's a great athlete. I hope she finds activities that keep her physically active through life. ”

Run ... skip ... play

Although many parents focus on organized sports, it's essential that children also develop their own patterns of play, says **Dr. Daniel Kraft, pediatric and adolescent sports**



medicine physician for Methodist Sports Medicine/The Orthopedic Specialists.

“Here's the problem with organized sports,” Kraft says. “When they start so young, they get so involved in a set routine, they don't develop habits on their own.”

Of his own 9-year-old daughter

Kathryn, Kraft comments, “I don't hope that she's a great athlete. I hope she finds activities that keep her physically active through life.” W

Fuller Knox, a freelance writer, likes spending time at her family's Brownsburg farm with her three sons, George, Warren and Charles.

The truth about specialization and sports injuries

There's rising concern about the increase in sports injuries for youth athletes. At the same time, parents often dream of their child winning a scholarship, even fame, by specializing in a single sport, like football, basketball or golf.

These two trends are related, says pediatric sports medicine specialist Dr. Daniel Kraft.

“Parents want to be good parents. They give that child every opportunity in one sport, they think their child will have a better chance of becoming a professional in that sport, and that's not true,” he explains. Instead, kids actually build strength and avoid ‘overuse injury’ by trying other sports.

Brownsburg High School basketball coach Joshua Kendrick points out other risks as well.

“One-sport specialization is really cheating young athletes of other experiences and friendships,” says Kendrick, who just led the Bulldogs to a first-ever IHSAA championship. “Who am I to tell a young athlete, you can't play football or run track because of my selfish desires as a coach?”

Kendrick notes Brownsburg has a strength and conditioning program. But even then, some student athletes will suffer injuries. “Injury is part of it, to learn through it,” says Kendrick, also an English teacher. “And we're talking injury, not deaths.”

If your athletic daughter does sustain a common injury such as an ACL tear, or your son has a fracture, try to take it in stride, Kraft says.

“It's not a negative thing but an inevitable thing because with more involvement with sports comes injury,” he says. Instead, seek treatment for your child and learn how to prevent future injuries. And remember, sports offer many growth opportunities, such as improved self-esteem, physical training and socialization, Kraft says.

