

Kick Off A Safe And Healthy Summer

Memorial Day is the traditional start of summer in the U.S., and for many of us that means time spent outdoors, swimming, picnics and travel. Here are some tips to help keep your family healthy, happy and far from the ER this summer.



Not Looking Forward To Swimsuit Season?

If you're wanting to lose weight, according to Lisa Lillien of the Hungry Girl website, don't go overboard with crash diets.

Instead, "make a few healthy tweaks to your eating habits."

Spend some weekend time prepping proteins and veggies, for instance. Then, when you want a freshly cooked meal, just throw the ingredients in a pan.

And have smart snacks around: jerky, protein bars, packs of nuts, fresh fruit. Eating more often might seem counter intuitive, but it can save us from making poor decisions at mealtime.

And on the topic of food: At picnics, make sure salads with mayonnaise stay in the shade. If they're brought directly from refrigerator to table, help yourself. But don't let them sit more than 15 minutes in the hot sun or you're courting problems.

Water Inside

Hydration is always important, but with hotter weather, it's even more important. Drinking lots of water is great for overall body function, and it keeps you from feeling unnecessarily hungry. Eight 8-ounce glasses of plain water every day will maintain moisture balance, but if you're a big fan of caffeine, you should triple that amount.

Bonus: staying hydrated gives your skin a healthy glow.

Water Outside

We all remember being told "You'll drown if you go into the water right after eating." That's too strong, but Sue Leahy, president of the American Safety and Health Institute, says that when we're digesting food, "There's less blood flow in your body and this takes away from strength. So if you really had to use your strength for undertow, you might have a problem." Best bet is to wait half an hour after you eat, just like mom said.

Children pose different problems. The National Safety Council says more than one in five drowning victims are 14 or under. Be sure to find age-appropriate swim lessons for your child, and don't rely on lifeguards; never leave your child unattended.

Be Good to Your Skin

No one wants to look like a peeling tomato, but it's not about appearances: just one blistering sunburn doubles your risk of melanoma. And it isn't enough to just apply sunscreen - you have to apply the right kind (SPF 15 or

higher) and frequently (every two hours). Studies show that most people don't apply nearly as much protection as they should. That means a teaspoon for the face, and for the body, about enough to fill a shot glass.

If you forgot your sunscreen, or didn't use enough, apply cooling botanicals generously, preferably at the first sight of a pink glow. The damage is done, but this will reduce peeling and inflammation.

Be Good To Your Eyes

At work or at play, when outdoors, wear [sunglasses](#) that block at least 99% of ultraviolet A and B. Sunglasses can help prevent cataracts, as well as [wrinkles](#).

Watch For Heat Stroke

This is a big problem for outdoor workers who can't take a break, and for older people who are in apartments with no air conditioning. But it can happen to anyone.

"The first sign is cramping in the legs," says Sue Leahy. "Cool off and drink fluids until it goes away. Cramping - especially in the leg - is a sign the body is losing salt and electrolytes, and you should heed it."

Get Debugged

Bugs love summer, too - all that exposed flesh. But they can transmit Lyme disease, West Nile, Zika and other illnesses. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend using insect repellants containing DEET (10% to 30%), except on children younger than 2 months.

Move It But Don't Lose It

The summer months are mobile ones, and not just in SRVs and station wagons. If your child travels by bicycle, skateboard or scooter, he or she needs to wear a helmet that meets CPSC safety standards. So do you, since children learn best by observing adults. Set the example. Never let children ride near moving traffic.

Children who are too young to have a driver's license shouldn't be allowed on riding lawnmowers or off-road vehicles. Children are involved in about 30 percent of all ATV-related deaths and ER injuries.

Fireworks

The Fourth of July is one of the biggest events of the summer, but emergency rooms brace for the upsurge in injuries every year. Fireworks can cause severe burns, blindness, scars or worse. Even sparklers, which you might think are safe, can reach temperatures over 1000 degrees. And they can start fires. The National Safety Council says that in a recent year, fireworks caused an estimated 15,500 reported fires, including 1,100 structure fires. Families should attend community fireworks displays run by professionals rather than using fireworks at home.