

# Fresh New School Year!

BACK-TO-SCHOOL GUIDE FOR PARENTS OF PRETEENS & TEENS

**12** Smart Snacks to Refuel After School

Connected Kids: Staying Safe With Digital Media

**5** Ways to Calm First-Day Jitters

Infections You Should Discuss With Your Child's Doctor

The ABCs of ZZZs

# 5 Ways to Calm First-Day Jitters

Back-to-school butterflies are completely normal! Ease the transition with these tips:

- 1. Focus on the positive** when discussing first days: seeing friends, learning new things, wearing new clothes, buying cool school supplies, etc.
- 2. Encourage** your child to jot down concerns if worrying keeps him up at night, and take the time to talk about them together.
- 3. Hike, walk, or ride bikes together:** Just getting active can be calming.
- 4. Discuss where your child can turn** if feeling overwhelmed at school: a nurse, guidance counselor, favorite teacher or coach from last year, etc.
- 5. Adjust your own schedule** so you're available the first week or so. You're the best resource your child has for getting — and staying — calm.

# Parents, it's that time of year again

when middle- and high-schoolers are heading back to class. We hope *Fresh New School Year!* can help you to help your kids meet their new challenges with excitement, motivation, and well-being.

Have a great new year!

Neil Izenberg, MD  
Founder & Editor-in-Chief  
KidsHealth.org



## Healthy Heads-Up Checklist

Speak with your child's doctor and school nurse about:

- emergency contacts**
- preventable infections** (such as those on the next page)
- possible medications** to administer (for food allergies, asthma, etc.)
- in-class learning issues** (ADHD, vision problems, etc.)
- the results of recent checkups**, according to school policies

**KidsHealth**  
from Nemours

*Fresh New School Year!* was written by the medical experts of KidsHealth.org, the #1 most-visited online source of information about children's health and parenting.

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# Infections You Can Help Prevent in Your Child



When you think “prevention,” you might think only of early-childhood health issues, but there are several infections that can affect preteens and teens. Talk to your doctor about how to help prevent these infections and the potentially serious diseases they can cause:

## ✓ **Chickenpox:**

This highly contagious virus causes itchy, fluid-filled blisters on the face, scalp, and body. In many cases, fever accompanies the rash. While most cases are in younger children, older kids and adults who get chickenpox are at greater risk of serious complications, such as pneumonia, involvement of the brain (less commonly) and bacterial infection of the skin.

## **Meningitis:**

This condition, usually due to infection by bacteria or viruses, causes inflammation of the membrane that covers the brain and spinal cord. The germs that cause meningitis often are spread from person to person through close contact. Symptoms can include headache, stiff neck, fever, nausea, sleepiness, and confusion. Meningitis can lead to serious complications such as brain damage and hearing loss. Immediate diagnosis and treatment is vitally important.

## → **Human papillomavirus (HPV):**

With over 40 genital types of this virus, HPV can affect 50% or more of males and females in their lifetime, though most infections clear on their own. Some types of this common sexually transmitted virus cause genital warts and other types are the cause of cervical cancer. Most people with HPV do not realize they are infected or that they can transmit the virus to a partner.

## ✓ **Pertussis:**

“Whooping cough” can start like the common cold — with runny nose, cough, and congestion — and symptoms can last for several weeks or months. In some cases, severe coughing and difficulty breathing occur. In older kids and teens, complications can include sleep disturbance, broken ribs, and pneumonia.

Pertussis is highly contagious, and family members can easily pass the disease to one another when an infected person sneezes or coughs. Cases of pertussis have been on the rise in the United States among adolescents.

Other infections or diseases that you may want to discuss with your child’s doctor are diphtheria, hepatitis A and B, influenza, measles, mumps, pneumonia, polio, rubella (German measles), and tetanus (lockjaw).

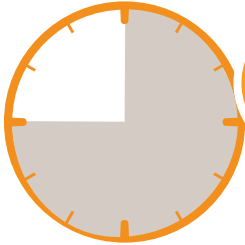


# The ABCs of

# zZZs

Not since your child was an infant was sleep as important as it is right now.

**Just how much is necessary?**



**9+ hours per night**

for **Preteens** (ages 10–12)  
**9+ hours per night**

and **Teens** (ages 13–19)  
**8½ to 9¼ hours per night**

Of course, your preteen's packed schedule means that adequate shut-eye may be only a dream. But sleep deprivation not only makes kids grumpier, it also impacts school performance as it decreases attentiveness and short-term memory. And for teens, sleepiness can lead to delayed response time and inconsistent performance, making driving and playing high-impact sports potentially dangerous.

Bottom line? Enforce consistent bedtimes and wake-ups throughout middle and high school. Your child's health and success may depend on it.



**Q:**

Can my child “catch up” on sleep on weekends?

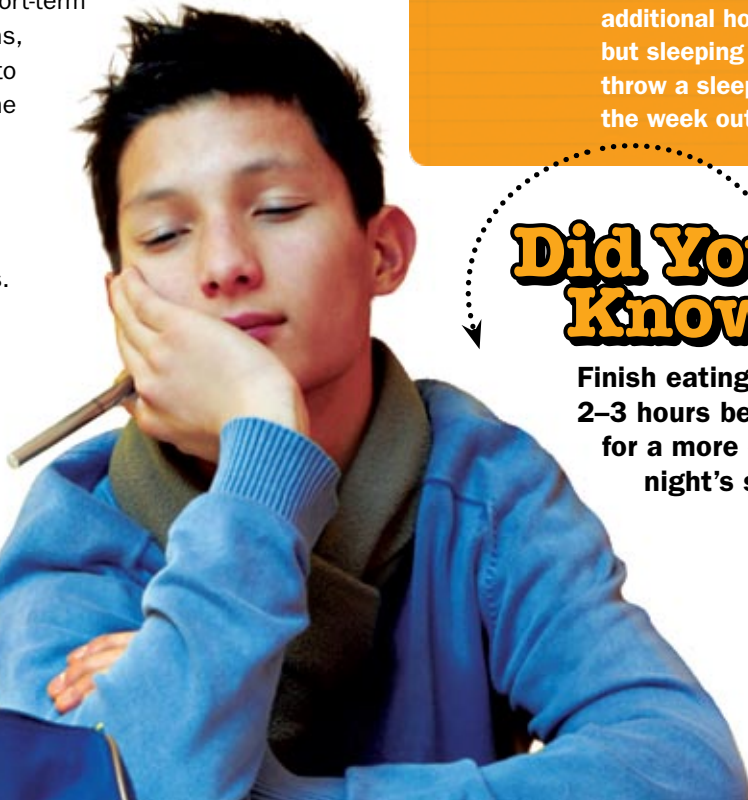
**A:**

**Not really.**

Your child might feel great on Monday after a Sunday snoozefest, but all that sleep won't add energy the rest of the week. Why? Our bodies can't store extra sleep. An additional hour or two is fine, but sleeping too long could throw a sleep schedule for the week out of whack.

**Did You Know?**

**Finish eating at least 2–3 hours before bedtime for a more comfortable night's sleep.**





# HEAD TO CLASS: WHY FAMILY VOLUNTEERS MATTER

You don't have to be the president of the PTA to get involved at your child's school: Whether it's an evening once a month or 2 hours twice a year, whatever time you do have to pitch in is valuable. Not only does the school benefit from your free assistance, but kids whose parents contribute to their classes see, firsthand, the importance of being involved in communities.

## 15+ Ways Parents Can Pitch In

It's OK to say no when asked to volunteer for a specific task and instead suggest something you'd be much happier doing. Think about your skills and interests:

### Which of these activities best fits you?

#### Schoolday Tasks

- tutor students
- guest lecture or teach
- volunteer in a computer lab
- help students with special needs
- monitor the lunchroom

#### Administrative Help

- prepare grant proposals
- maintain school Web site
- attend board meetings

#### After-Class Tasks

- chaperone away games, dances, field trips
- work concession stands
- organize fundraisers
- start a special-interest club
- sew costumes or uniforms
- build drama sets
- coach music groups
- hold trade workshops



# CONNECTED KIDS: STAYING SAFE WITH DIGITAL MEDIA

Among American teens, 1 of 3 sends more than 100 text messages a day, and nearly 3 of 4 use social networking Web sites like Facebook. Is that cause for panic? Not necessarily. Parents can relate to and spend time with their kids by staying current with digital media themselves.

## Here are a few online safety tips to consider:

- **Think about the future.**

Digital footprints are forever. What seems like a humorous photo now could work against your teen in a job interview later.

- **Keep the computer in a high-traffic area**

like the kitchen or family room, so your preteen can more easily share his or her online experience.

- **Shut down electronics**

well before bedtime so kids can wind down.

- **Get an account yourself**

to know firsthand what your kids are experiencing.

- **Spend the majority of your time together offline.**

Don't rely on kids' status updates to know what's going on in their world.



**“My Teacher Doesn’t Like Me!”**

These 3 steps can empower your child to take charge of his or her education:

**1**

### **Establish whether she’s fulfilling her student responsibilities.**

Ask, “Do you attend class prepared and ready to learn? Do you listen when your teacher is talking?” Discuss all responses.

**2**

### **Encourage him to ask for help.**

Peers may have tips on getting along, and talking directly to the teacher may resolve the issue. Consider rehearsing what your child could say so he’s confident in his delivery.

**3**

### **Get involved yourself if prior efforts don’t remedy the situation.**

Contact the teacher and discuss your child’s attempts and your concerns.

# Are You a Star Homework Helper?

When it comes to your child's homework, your role is to offer support and guidance, answer questions, help interpret assignment instructions, and review the completed work. Tough as it may be, **resist giving answers**: Homework is meant to reinforce the lessons kids learn in class, plus teach problem-solving skills.

**If your aspiring student asked the following homework questions, how would your answers be graded: A? Or A+?**

## Their Q:

"When you return your library books, can you pick up some stuff for me on the solar system?"

"What does the frontal lobe do?"

"I don't even know where to start this project!"

## Your A:

"Tell me about your project. I'll see what I can find."

"It has something to do with emotions and personality."

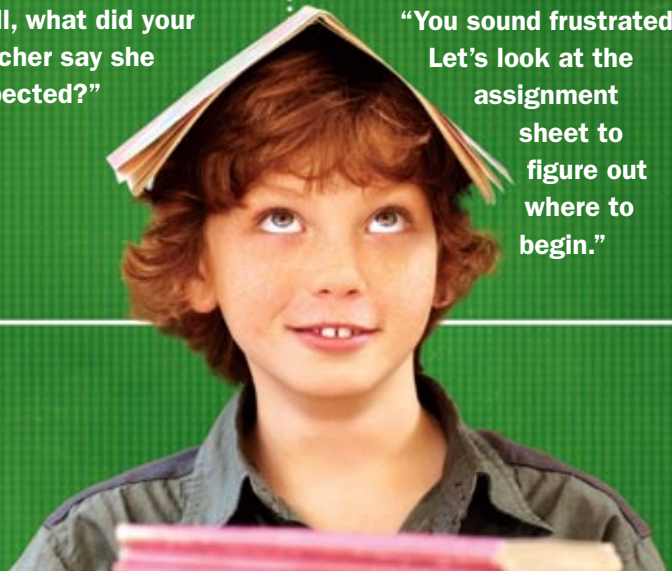
"Well, what did your teacher say she expected?"

## Your **A+**:

"We'll go together after school tomorrow. Have you checked the online catalog to see what's available?"

"Are you learning about it in biology? Let's look it up in your textbook."

"You sound frustrated. Let's look at the assignment sheet to figure out where to begin."



# Refuel After School



If your child walks in the door ravenous each afternoon, offer these **12 high-energy, low-fat brain foods:**

- bowl of cereal (with 3 or more grams of fiber) and low-fat milk
- fresh fruit kabobs + low-fat or nonfat yogurt
- low-fat or nonfat pudding cups + chopped nuts
- graham cracker + peanut butter
- oatmeal (not flavored) swirled with sugar-free jam
- hardboiled egg + grape tomatoes
- hummus + whole-wheat pita
- air-popped popcorn with grated Parmesan cheese
- apple and cheddar slices OR pear and Swiss cheese slices
- guacamole + veggie sticks
- salsa + fresh pepper “scoops”
- mini-bagel sandwiches with lean ham or turkey with leafy greens

**Q:**

**What should my athlete eat before a game?**

**A:**

**Consider this hunger-defensive lineup for a child who plays an active sport:**

- **2 to 4 hours prior:** a protein + carbs snack or light meal (e.g., turkey sandwich, chicken noodle soup, cereal with low-fat milk)
- **1 to 2 hours prior:** a light snack, such as low-fiber fruits or veggies (e.g., plums, melons, cherries, carrots), crackers, a bagel, or low-fat yogurt
- **Less than 1 hour before:** Water only. Digestion requires energy, and you don't want your child feeling sluggish on the field.

**Yum!**

**Find lunch ideas & more:**

[KidsHealth.org/recipes](https://kidshealth.org/recipes)

**KidsHealth**

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