

Back to School



Should My Child Play Sports?

Sports are a great way for kids to improve both their mental and physical health.

The President's Council on Sports, Fitness & Nutrition Science Board found that participating in sports is associated with lower rates of anxiety and depression, lower stress, higher self-esteem, reduced risk of suicide, increased cognitive performance, increased creativity and increased life satisfaction. Furthermore, it found that physical activity such as organized sports improves bone health, weight, cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness and reduces a child's risk of cancer and diabetes.

EARLY SPECIALIZATION

But there is a downside to participating in youth sports, and that's when a child participates in tough, year-round training in just one sport, or what experts call early youth sport specialization. That can lead to overuse injuries such as stress fractures.

"There is no evidence that young children will benefit from early sport specialization in the majority of sports," a panel from the American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine wrote in a consensus statement. "They are subject to overuse injury and burnout from concentrated activity."

The American Academy of Pediatrics says that playing multiple sports is better for



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young athletes and advocates delaying specialization until late adolescence.

"A better, healthier alternative to single sport specialization is for kids to play a variety of sports year-round," Dr. Peter Fabricant of the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York. "If a kid loves baseball, they

can play that sport for two seasons. The other two seasons, they can participate in recreational or organized sports that don't involve overhead throwing. That way, they're giving their arm a rest."

CONSIDERATIONS

Before enrolling your student

in a new sport, consider their schedule. Will they have time for practices and games? Will you have time to take them to practices and games? Do you have a back-up plan in case you can't be there? Some sports also require a pretty hefty upfront expense in equipment. Can your family's budget accommo-

date that expense for a new sport that your child may not continue to compete in?

Sit down and talk to your child about the commitments and responsibilities involved with being a student athlete and make sure they — and you — are up to the task before signing on the dotted line.

Tech Buys For 2023

School gets more tech-heavy with each passing year, and this school year is no different.

Here are some of the best tech buys for your student to get the year started off right. Prices vary.

A. Best Home Study Tech from Engadget: Soundance Laptop Stand, \$40

Using a laptop for a long period of time can wreak havoc on your posture and lead to neck and upper back pain. A laptop stand like this one from Soundance keeps your computer at the right level for your eyesight. In general, Engadget says, you want your eye level to be one or two inches below the top of the display. The Soundance stand can support laptops with up to a 15-inch screen and, thanks to detachable components, is easily portable for use at home, at school or wherever you need to hit the books.

B. Best Back-to-School Gear for \$100 or Less from CNET: JBL Go 3, \$30

This pocket-sized power-pack of a wireless speaker is great for listening to music, podcasts or lectures on the go. It comes in fashionable color combinations and is waterproof and dustproof, so it's cleared to go anywhere. It connects wirelessly to any Bluetooth-enabled device.

C. Best Parental Control Software from PC Magazine: Norton Family, \$49.99 per year
Norton Family monitors an

unlimited number of devices and sees your kids' activity from the web or a mobile app. It also encourages parents to talk to their children about online safety rather than just spying on them from afar. It includes geofencing tools and House Rules for conversations about staying safe online.

However, it doesn't work on Macs and browser extensions can be easily disabled.

D. Best Back-to-School Tech Deals from Digital Camera World: HP Chromebook 14 FHD, \$229.99

The standout feature of this budget laptop, Digital Camera World says, is its 14-inch full

HD 1080p screen. It runs Google's ChromeOS operating system, so for those with an Android phone, it'll be familiar. It won't run Windows software, but Google offers free versions of a lot of Windows programs that are at least very similar.

E. Best Backpack for a Laptop from Teen Vogue: J.

Crew RAINS mini, \$95

The RAINS mini from J. Crew is a smaller version of Backpack. It features contemporary lines and a waterproof exterior with a laptop pocket, a main compartment and a concealed phone pocket on the back panel. It comes in a stylish pink-and-black palette.



After-School Programs

For working parents, the hours between when school gets out and when work is over are a challenge.

They have to arrange for after-school programs for their children that not only keep them safe and cared for, but are also mentally or physically engaging.

A national survey reported by U.S. News & World Report showed that 65% of K-8 parents and guardians have children enrolled in after-school activities, both to provide care and also to expose their children to new experiences, ideas and perspectives.

The magazine said it was most important to let children explore a range of activities rather than specialize in one at an early age. The right mix of after-school activities can improve grades, boost school attendance and regulate behavior, the Afterschool Alliance says. When children are exposed to a diverse range of ages and backgrounds, they can also build better communication and teamwork skills, experts say.

“That kind of group play is critical for social-emotional development,” Karen Pittman, cofounder of the Forum for Youth Investment told U.S. News & World Report.

You can find after-school activities in an extended day option at your school, with organizations like the YMCA,



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Boys & Girls Clubs of America, at local churches and community centers, and with some sports teams. Some parents may also opt for private lessons in music or other subjects. A Learning Heroes survey says parents use an average of two programs to occupy

their children after school.

With all the options, experts advise parents to tread carefully. Afterschool providers should have a background in child development and have enough trained and experienced staff on hand to deal with children in a group set-

ting. To find great programs in your area, the Afterschool Alliance advises parents to talk to the teachers or administrators at their schools, then reach out to national organizations that may be active in your community, such as the 4-H Council, Camp Fire USA

and the local parks and recreation department. You can also talk to other parents in your school to see what they do or reach out to programs at community centers, museums, art councils, libraries and youth employment programs.

Stopping Backpack Pain

Backpacks are a great way for students to get their stuff around school and to their activities.

However, improperly used, backpacks can cause kids back problems. The weight of a backpack worn the wrong way can pull you backward, causing people wearing them to lean forward, stressing their shoulders, neck and back.

And if you toss the backpack over one shoulder, you'll lean to the side to offset the weight, harming your back, shoulders and neck. Heavy packs can also cause people to fall, particularly on stairs or in other places where the large pack throws the wearer off balance.

SIGNS YOUR BACKPACK IS A PROBLEM

Nemours Teens Health says that if you struggle to take your backpack on and off, lean forward to carry your pack or have back pain, it might be a problem. You may also experience tingling, numbness or weakness in your arms or hands.

HOW TO PROPERLY WEAR A BACKPACK

Pick a pack that has two padded back straps that go over both shoulders. Avoid messenger bags, which concentrate the weight on one side of your body. The wider your backpack's straps, the better, and



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even better if it comes with a waist belt, which can help spread the weight out across your body.

Backpacks should be lightweight and have multiple compartments to help distribute the weight. You should also work as much as you can to lighten your load. Use a

bathroom scale to make sure the backpack isn't more than 10%-20% of your body weight. Use school lockers or cubbies to leave some books behind instead of carrying a whole day's worth of work with you.

Pack the heaviest items closest to your back and don't just shove everything in the

main compartment. Side pockets can also help spread the weight out. Wear the straps tight enough for the backpack to fit close to the body, in the middle of your back. It shouldn't sag down to your butt. Pick up the backpack with both hands and lift with your legs.

STRENGTHEN YOUR MUSCLES

Weight training, pilates and yoga are all effective in strengthening muscles to help you carry your backpack and eliminate pain. Work on stretching every morning and evening and exercise regularly.

Eye Health For Kids

Back-to-school is a great time to get your kids' eyes checked.

Children's eyes can change quickly as they grow, the American Academy of Ophthalmology says, and you should have their vision checked regularly. The academy also recommends vision screenings in preschool, as children enter elementary school, if they are experiencing a vision problem, and before and during growth hormone therapy.

FARSIGHTEDNESS

Many school-aged children are farsighted, the academy says, but in most cases, they don't need glasses. They can generally accommodate by using their focusing muscles and, as children grow, the farsightedness will improve on its own. Significant farsightedness, however, can lead to strabismus and amblyopia if not corrected. Strabismus, or crossed eyes, is when your eyes do not line up properly and may point in different directions. Amblyopia is lazy eye, when vision doesn't develop in one eye properly.

SCREEN TIME

Limiting screen time may lower the risk of myopia, or nearsightedness and digital eye strain. Encourage children to practice the 20-20-20 rule. Look up from the screen every 20 minutes and focus at least 20 feet away for 20 seconds. Blue



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light isn't necessarily dangerous for your children's eyes, the academy says, but it may cause sleep problems.

SIGNS OF VISION PROBLEMS

The academy says that an ophthalmologist appointment should be made if you notice:

- A quick loss of interest in

activities that require eye use.

- Losing your place when reading.
- Turning the head to look at something in front of you.

Some photos can help diagnose children's eye problems. Problems can be signaled by a red reflex or reflection of the camera flash off the retina. A white, yellow or black reflec-

tion in one or both eyes is abnormal and can be a warning sign for the presence of an eye condition.

EYE INJURIES

More than 90% of children's eye injuries can be prevented with protective goggles, the academy says. Children should wear sports eye protectors for

baseball, basketball, football, racquet sports, soccer, hockey, lacrosse, paintball and other activities with a risk of eye injury.

If children wear contacts, talk to them about properly caring for their lenses and their eyes. Improper contact lens care can lead to impaired vision or even blindness.

Talking About Social Media

Nearly 90% of teens ages 13-17 have used social media, the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry says.

Two-thirds of teens have at least one social media account and 51% visit a social media site at least daily. On average, teens are online almost nine hours a day, not including homework.

That's a lot of screen time. And a lot of influence from online personalities and friends. While social media does allow teens to stay connected and form their own communities, it can also expose them to dangerous activities and people, including cyberbullying and privacy risks.

"Teenagers need support and education to develop the skills to manage their social media use," the AACAP says. "It's important to talk with your child about their social media use and your family rules, including consequences for too much use or inappropriate use and whether you will be monitoring their online activities."

You can consider such rules as no-screen times, such as at the dinner table or until homework is done, friending or following your child's social media accounts with an agreement about whether you will or won't post or respond to their posts. You should also



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ensure that privacy settings are turned on to limit access to personal information and tell your teens not to share full names, addresses, telephone numbers, social security numbers, passwords or any other personal information. Their location services should be set

to off and you should keep an eye on what apps they're using.

A Pew Research Center survey found that teens 13-17 reported that TikTok was the top social media app for that age group and that 16% described their use of the app

as "almost constantly." Another one in every five teens visit or use YouTube almost constantly and more than half of teens say it would be hard to give up social media.

If you feel like your teen is spending too much time on

social media or becomes upset by what they see, talk to your family's pediatrician or doctor, the academy says, or a trained and qualified mental health professional. They can help you and your child develop safe, appropriate rules for social media use.

Healthy School Lunches

More kids than ever before are obese and, for many parents, making sure their kids get a healthy school lunch is a priority.

Healthy lunches also help keep kids from getting sick and ensures they can pay attention throughout the school day.

REVIEW THE MENU

Whether you're packing a lunch or your child is eating school lunch, the Cleveland Clinic suggests reviewing the week's menu with your student ahead of time. Talk to them about options and what would make for a healthy and balanced plate.

"This strategy gives parents a great opportunity to discuss the benefits of different meal options and why certain foods may be healthier and make them feel better than others," Cleveland Clinic pediatric dietitian Jennifer Hyland says. "Plus, involving the child in any decision-making process typically leads to better outcomes and acceptance — and the meal-planning process is no exception."

PACKING A GOOD LUNCH

Spend some time as a family picking out food that everyone likes, then rotate those options into your menu. This will decrease boredom and help ensure they actually eat their



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packed lunch, the clinic says. Start by asking what fruits and vegetables they would enjoy, but you may have to make some things more child-friendly. For instance, apple slices may be more appealing to young children than a whole apple. Have children pick one food from each category of

protein, grains, fruit, veggies and healthy sides and snacks.

MIND THE DRINK

Watch out to make sure your children aren't drinking their calories. Sodas and sugary sports drinks and juices may be the cool choice, but not the healthiest. Instead, encourage

your children to pack water or unflavored low-fat milk. Freezing a small bottle of water and using it as both the drink and the ice pack works great, too. If you have to send juice, choose a four- or six-ounce bottle of 100% juice.

Some of these strategies may be more time-consuming

than many parents are used to, but remember that we're building healthy habits for life. When children learn to eat healthy, balanced meals at a young age, it tends to be a practice that follows them into adulthood, helping them live a healthier life at a healthy weight.