

Smart ways to live well

JULY 2008

family

# Prevention

## CLEAN SIMPLE HEALTH

Mini Moves for  
Major Energy,  
Weight Loss,  
Immunity

### HEALING SUPERFOODS!

Disease-Fighting  
Meals, p. 75

Beautiful  
Skin for  
Every  
Decade

BOOST  
BRAIN  
POWER  
in 1 Day!

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HEALTH  
SIGNS TO  
NEVER  
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### FIGHT FAT FOR LIFE!

- Win Back Your Metabolism
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## Hidden Health Risks for Teens

*The scary headlines have it wrong. Here, 5 real dangers—and our fast fixes* ■ BY LIZ PLOSSER ■ ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALISON SEIFFER



**KIDNAPPINGS!** Sex parties! Steroids! If you're a parent, the barrage of scare stories may be keeping you awake at night. The good news: They don't pose as great a risk to your teen as you think. The bad: You should take steps to guard against some hidden dangers you've probably never thought about. For instance, seemingly innocent activities, like carrying a bulky book bag or driving a pal home from school, can lead to injury or worse. Breathe easy: It's a cinch to keep your kids safe from these health hazards with a few simple strategies.

### 1. Internet tell-alls

Teenagers love to overshare on MySpace profiles and Facebook wall postings, but they often have no idea that coaches, teachers, college

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**THE GUIDING RULE: YOUR CHILD'S BACKPACK SHOULD TOP OUT AT NO MORE THAN 10% OF HIS BODY WEIGHT. PICK ONE WITH EXTRA PADDING.**

admission committees, and prospective employers may someday see their exploits. "Their profiles become public knowledge and last forever," says Beth Blecherman, founder of *techmamas.com*, a blog that counsels parents on family technology and Web safety. "Your child may remove a regrettable post, photo, or YouTube video, but someone else could already have downloaded it—and posted it on his own profile, Web site, or blog."

#### ■ KEEP THEM SAFE

Get comfortable with social networking sites so you can talk with your child about what's smart and what's not. This doesn't mean that 'friending' all of your child's classmates, or that it's important to know what's being dis-

cussed on these sites," says Blecherman. "Make sure he doesn't list personal information like his phone number, home address, or social plans." Teens should set up privacy controls on MySpace and Facebook to allow only their close friends to view their pages. Finally, before your child applies for a job or college, he should Google himself. That way, he'll see any embarrassing information and can remove it—or ask his friend to—before a decision maker sees it.

### 2. Superheavy backpacks

Experts say that a bag that weighs more than 10% of a kid's body weight can cause a host of painful problems, such as bad posture, aching shoulders, and a sore neck.

#### ■ KEEP THEM SAFE

Pick a pack with extra-cushy shoulder and back padding. "It should sit high on the back—a few inches above the waistline on the spine," says Samuel Forjuoh, MD, PhD, director of research in the department of family and community medicine at Texas A&M College of Medicine. "If it slips lower, all that pressure could lead to spine damage." Because backpacks evenly distribute the weight, they're preferable to messenger or tote bags. But if your daughter doesn't want to give up her satchel, remind her to switch shoulders throughout the day.

### 3. Ignoring serious allergies

In the thrill of newfound independence, college kids may neglect pesky but important responsibilities, such as bringing along their emergency allergy medicine—like an EpiPen (a doctor-prescribed syringe that contains a dose of epinephrine for the most severe reactions). "These kids haven't had allergy attacks for such a long

time that they can forget to carry around lifesaving medicine," says Jim King, MD, president of the American Academy of Family Physicians.

"But if they go into anaphylactic shock, minutes and seconds count."

#### ■ KEEP THEM SAFE

Before they leave for college, get them in the habit of keeping injectors in multiple spots—like in their desk, a bedroom drawer, and the bag they take to class—so they're always prepared. Because the medication can lose potency over time, suggest that they sign up at *epipen.com* for e-mail alerts about approaching expiration dates.

### 4. Driving around siblings

Having your kid play chauffeur could be the most dangerous favor you ask of her. Teens are twice as likely to get in an accident when they have passengers in the car, compared with when they're driving alone, finds a study by the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute. Inexperience and immaturity are to



blame, leaving them easily distracted, says lead researcher C. Raymond Bingham, PhD.

#### ■ KEEP THEM SAFE

Resist the temptation to hand over driving chores immediately. In addition to ferrying passengers, Bingham notes, driving after sunset or on weekends also raises the risk of a crash. So set ground rules—no passengers, no driving late at night. Then gradually ease the restrictions during your teen's first year of driving.

### 5. Germy schools

A dangerous superbug recently closed schools in Virginia, Michigan, and other states. In 2005, 18,650 Americans died from the infection. Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*

(commonly called MRSA; pronounced *MUR-suh*) is a fast-moving bacteria that's resistant to many antibiotics and can cause minor skin irritations; bone, joint, or blood infections; pneumonia; and even death.

#### ■ KEEP THEM SAFE

Studies show that student athletes are at increased risk. The bacteria flourishes in warm, moist places, so "it's important that kids shower after practices and games, and wash their hands after using weight room equipment," says King. Make sure your teen bandages cuts, because bacteria can enter the body through open wounds. And have your kids get a flu shot each year—this helps protect them against MRSA pneumonia. ■

## Teen pregnancy on the rise

One risk that *deserves* to make headlines: A 14-year decline in teen pregnancy rates has come to a grinding halt. A report released in January by the CDC noted an alarming 3% spike from 2005 to 2006 in the number of births among 15- to 19-year-olds. Send your adolescent to *stayteen.org*, a Web site that discusses thorny relationship issues and facts about teen pregnancy. Or better yet—go on the site together to start a dialogue.