

Wellness Articles

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If you would like to be added to the distribution list for these articles, please email: Rebecca.johnson2@albertahealthservices.ca. You will receive a monthly email containing articles for the upcoming four weeks.

An archive of past wellness articles is available at <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/9966.asp>

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Alberta Health Services (AHS) knows that wellness matters, and this year AHS has been asking our people and Albertans, 'What's your balance?' Throughout the year of wellness and finding balance, AHS is highlighting different areas of wellness.

Join the Conversation on social media using the hashtag **#AHSWhatsYourBalance**.

Back to School Health Checklist

It's that time of year again. Store shelves are stacked with back-to-school supplies and racks of summer clothes are being replaced with sweaters and long pants. Getting your child ready for the new school year includes stocking up on notebooks, binders and pencils, but there's more to making the most of the year ahead: taking care of your child's health. As the most important head-start you can give your child, beginning the year with good health is also simple with this back-to-school health checklist:

- **Immunization:** Ensure your child's immunizations are up-to-date for his or her age. This is especially important for kids entering kindergarten or elementary school. If your son or daughter is in Grade 5 and/or Grade 9, also watch for immunization consent forms coming home early in the school year. Remember: your signature on these forms is needed for your child to get his or her important grade 5 and/or grade 9 immunizations.
- **Vision screening:** Have your child's vision tested before he or she starts kindergarten (ideally by age three) and again every year, until 18 years of age. It's estimated that up to 80 per cent of learning is visual, so keeping your kid's eyes healthy goes a long way in encouraging their full learning potential.

- **Hearing/speech screening:** If you suspect your child may have a hearing or speech problem, ask your family doctor for a referral to an audiologist and/or speech specialist. Left untreated, these problems could interfere with your child's learning.
- **Dental checkup:** Regular dental checkups start early! If your child hasn't had his or her teeth examined prior to starting school, now is a good time to start. Remember: good oral health is essential to good overall health. Regular checkups and cleanings help detect dental problems early, and ensure your child's teeth stay healthy for life.
- **Emergency contacts:** Make sure the school has up-to-date emergency numbers for each of your children, including contact information for parents, physicians, etc.
- **Health conditions:** Ensure the school has up-to-date information about any health conditions, allergies or physical impairments your child may have. Also inform the school about any medications your child takes.
- **Backpack basics:** Your child's backpack should fit properly and shouldn't be too heavy for him or her to carry, which means it should weigh no more than 10 to 15 per cent of your child's body weight. The backpack should have broad shoulder straps and a waist strap that keeps the bag firmly on the spine. Watch for warning signs that the bag may be too heavy, including sore shoulders or changes in posture.
- **Nutrition plan:** Ensure your child has a healthy breakfast before heading to school in the mornings, and help him or her pack a nutritious lunch. Planning meals ahead of time and involving children in planning and preparation can make this task more manageable and fun.