



# Fort Carson-MEDDAC News

## Preparing Children to Go Back to School

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It's back to school time again! Are you recovering from the wild fires, returning from a trip to Disney or a family reunion? Before the plunge into fall sports programs, new teachers, friends, and classes, stop to take a deep collective family breath. It's often a good idea to take a few steps to ease your family, and especially your children, into the next phase. Here are some suggestions for a successful transition into the next school year.

### Take Some Time

Take a day to stop "doing" and just be together as a family. Spend some time around a picnic, on a hike, or around a game table to talk with your children about what they've done this summer and how they think and feel about the events.

Children affected by the wild fires or any other significant life event, may need to process what has happened to them. Ask lots of questions and listen.

Traumatic events can be carried forward and add to the stress of school, resulting in difficulty concentrating and learning. This may result in more "acting out" and rule breaking. Helping children talk through their fear, sadness or uncertainty about the future can help them have a fresh mental and emotional start.

### Get Medical Exams

Children need to have a thorough medical exam before each school year begins so health issues are thoroughly addressed, medications are updated or refilled, and they are healthy enough to play sports.

Sports physicals are not the same as complete physical exams, which should be done yearly. When a child receives a sports physical, their muscles and joints should be examined for full range of motion. Their heart and lungs are checked for signs of murmurs, rate and function.

Families with a relative who died suddenly before age 50, or who have a history of heart problems in children or young adults, should discuss this with their health care provider. These are risk factors for hidden heart conditions that can cause sudden death in teenagers who play strenuous sports.



## **Overcome Summer Jet Lag**

Recent studies demonstrated that people who go to sleep on a different schedule on the weekends will suffer from a kind of short term “jet lag” on Monday. The term refers to a condition where the internal body clock gets reset to a different schedule. It can sometimes take several days for the body to adjust to a new sleep and activity schedule.

Children need to be eased back in to their school sleep schedule about two weeks before returning to school. Start their school bedtime routine early for a smoother transition to classroom hours.

Finally, studies show children who get less than 8 hours of sleep a night do not retain things they study or learn during the day. Eight to ten hours of sleep locks in what they learn. Many older children will try to stay up late to do homework or study for a test. If they get less than 8 hours of sleep, all that studying may be to no avail.

## **Talk about Priorities**

Children should not be so busy that they don’t have time to rest, relax, have some fun, get dinner and homework done at a reasonable pace and get into bed at a reasonable hour.

Before the school year begins, sit down and discuss what extracurricular activities children can reasonably engage in without making their bodies, minds, or school work suffer. Making a family plan will help avoid emotional last minute decisions that may be harmful to them.

Children who are constantly running become exhausted, emotional, lose the ability to make good decisions, retain information, and follow rules. We need to teach them balance.

The American Academy of Pediatrics strongly urges parents to limit television and video game time to no more than two hours a day. Studies have shown that too much of these activities change concentration and certain thinking abilities in children. Their brains need a real break to keep functioning and not burn out.