

This Just In...

The latest parenting news, research, and health tips from our experts



Take Vitamins Before and During Pregnancy: It's Important

If you are pregnant or hope to become pregnant, your doctor may have recommended taking a prenatal (before birth) vitamin supplement to help make sure your body receives all the nutrients it needs for a healthy pregnancy.

Taking prenatal vitamins before or during pregnancy can also reduce the development of the most common childhood cancers by nearly 50 percent, according to research conducted by Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children.

The study found that pregnant women who took a multivitamin fortified with folic acid "lowered the chance a child would develop a brain tumor by 27 percent, leukemia by 39 percent, and neuroblastoma by 49 percent." Researchers discovered years ago that taking prenatal vitamins reduced the risk of another problem, spina bifida, by as much as 80 percent.

Folic acid is a B-complex vitamin that helps generate new cells and prevent major birth defects of the brain and spine. Folic acid is naturally found in leafy green vegetables, fruits, dried beans, peas, nuts, enriched breads, cereals, and other grain products.

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Tooth Decay

Tooth decay among children ages 2 to 5 years old is on the rise, based on data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics. In fact, toddlers' tooth decay increased from 24 percent during 1988 to 1994 to 28 percent during 1999 to 2004.

The study also revealed the differences in dental health along racial, ethnic, and economic lines. About 31 percent of Hispanic children ages 6 to 11 years old had decay in their permanent teeth, compared to 19 percent of white children. Twelve percent of children ages 6 to 11 from families with incomes below the federal poverty line had untreated tooth decay. That compared with just 4 percent among children from families with incomes above the poverty line.

The oral health news is not all bad for American children. The percentage of tooth decay in the permanent teeth of children ages 6 to 11 years went down from about 25 to 21 percent. Among adolescents ages 12 to 19 years, the percentages went down from 68 to 59 percent. Also, the use of dental sealants, a plastic coating applied to teeth that protects against decay, increased from 22 to 30 percent among children ages 6 to 11 years and from 18 to 38 percent among adolescents aged 12 to 19 years.

Lyme Disease Rates Bite Hardest in 10 States

Lyme disease is a bacterial infection that is transmitted to people most often by bites from deer ticks. The number of reported cases of potentially deadly Lyme disease has more than doubled since 1991, according to a report by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).



“This increase in cases is most likely the result of both a true increase in the frequency of the disease as well as better recognition and reporting due to enhanced detection of cases,” said Paul Mead, MD, a medical epidemiologist with the CDC’s Division of Vector-Borne Infectious Diseases.

The report noted that 93 percent of reported cases were in just 10 states: Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin. During 2003–2005, a total of 64,382 Lyme disease cases were reported to CDC from 46 states and the District of Columbia. In 1991 fewer than 10,000 cases of Lyme disease were reported.

Those rates were higher in two age groups — children ages 5 to 14 years (10 cases per 100,000 population per year) and adults ages 55 to 64 years (9.9 cases per 100,000 population per year). Most illnesses occurred in the summer, when disease-carrying ticks are most active.

The best ways to help protect your children against deer ticks and Lyme disease are:

- Encourage your children to wear light-colored long-sleeve shirts and long pants tucked into the socks, and check your children daily for ticks.
- Use an insect repellent with 30 percent or less of the active ingredient DEET. (Do not use DEET on infants under 2 months.)
- Apply an insecticide that targets ticks (such as permethrin) to clothing, tents, and other gear, but not on the skin.
- Avoid tick-infested areas.

Tick populations around homes and in recreational areas can be reduced 50 to 90 percent through simple landscaping. This includes removing brush and dried leaves, and creating a buffer zone of wood chips or gravel between forest and lawn or recreational areas.

Removing ticks within 24 hours of attachment greatly reduces the risks of catching the disease. Early symptoms of Lyme disease infection include fever, headache, fatigue, and a skin rash. Left untreated, infection can spread to joints, the heart, and the nervous system. See a health care provider if these symptoms develop.

The full CDC report is available online at www.cdc.gov/mmwr. ●

Healthy Homework Is a Matter of Habit

Make sure your children are off to a good start this school year by building consistent and healthy habits for completing homework. Here are a few tips to help:

- Create a space at home that helps your child do homework. Youngsters need a permanent workspace in their bedroom or another part of the home that offers privacy.
- Set aside enough regular time for homework.
- Make it a firm rule that the TV, radio, and computer stay off during homework time.
- Be there to answer questions and offer help, but never do your children’s homework for them.
- To help reduce eye, neck, and brain fatigue while studying, students should take a break for 10 minutes every hour.
- If your child is having a hard time with a particular subject and you can’t help, consider hiring a tutor. Talk it over with your child’s teacher first.

