



WELCOME TO *THE HEALTHY BUZZ*

Advocates for Healthy Kids is here to cut through the noise and bring parents the practical, balanced information they need to raise strong, healthy families. From real-life nutrition tips to clear breakdowns of hot-button health topics, this newsletter delivers resources, ideas, and encouragement — so you can stay confident in the most important role you'll ever have: **being your child's greatest advocate.**

A NOTE FROM DR. DUNNAVANT



Dear Friends,

As we head into the Fourth of July weekend, I know for a lot of families that means a backyard full of people, something on the grill, and kids who won't come inside until the sun goes down.

I love this weekend for exactly that reason. It's one of the few times of year when everyone is outside at the same time, for no reason other than it's summer and it's worth celebrating.

If you've got a pool party on the calendar, soak it up! Unstructured time in the water, chasing cousins around the yard, staying up late for fireworks — this really is the good stuff. These moments matter more than we sometimes give them credit for.

One gentle reminder from your friendly neighborhood physician: when there's water involved, it's always worth having a designated adult whose only job is watching the kids... phone put away, fully present. For little ones and newer swimmers, a life jacket is a simple, easy peace of mind.

You can be relaxed and prepared at the same time. That's the sweet spot.

Have a wonderful Fourth. Be loud, eat well, and hold your people close.

Warmly,
Dr. Siobhan Dunnavant, MD
Senior Advisor, Advocates for Healthy Kids

FACT OR MYTH?

FACT OR MYTH?



If my kid isn't complaining of thirst,
they're hydrated enough.

Keep up the conversation!

Follow us [@adv4healthykids](#) for useful tips, clear breakdowns on hot-button issues, and encouragement to stay empowered and confident in your role as a key part of your child's growth.

ADVOCACY ACTION



Summer Fun Checklist



SUNSCREEN APPLIED



WATER BOTTLE PACKED



WATER WATCHER ASSIGNED



SHADE BREAK MIDDAY



TICK CHECK BEFORE BED



5 Simple Ways to Keep Kids Safe This Summer

Summer is for FUN, and a little preparation goes a long way toward making sure it stays that way. Here are five easy things every parent can do this season:

1. Make sunscreen non-negotiable.

Apply SPF 30 or higher 15 minutes before heading outside, and reapply every two hours or after swimming.

2. Keep water flowing all day. Kids are notoriously bad at recognizing thirst, especially when they're busy having fun. Don't wait for them to ask. Send them outside with a water bottle and make sipping a regular part of the day.

3. Designate a water watcher. If there's a pool, lake, or sprinkler involved, assign one adult whose only job is watching the kids.

4. Find shade in the middle of the day. Peak sun hours run from 10am to 4pm. You don't have to go inside — just slow down, find some shade, and let everyone cool off.

5. Do a tick check before coming inside. Check hair, behind ears, armpits, and behind knees. Remove ticks promptly and correctly.

Summer is long and full of good things. A little preparation means you can relax and enjoy all of it.

THE LATEST

Before You Head to the Pool, Talk to Your Pediatrician

Summer is officially here, and the 4th of July is right around the corner. The sunscreen is stocked, the swim bag is packed, and your kids are already asking when they can get to the pool.

But before the days spent under the sun and in the water, there's an important conversation you should have with your family. And it could save your child's life.

The Numbers Every Parent Should Know

Drowning is the leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 4. For kids ages 5 to 14, it's the [second leading cause](#). The numbers come straight from the CDC. Drowning shows up every summer, in every kind of community: in pools, lakes, bathtubs and even buckets of water.

The sobering part is that most of it is largely preventable. This isn't meant to be a scary conversation. It's because preparation, not panic, is what makes the difference.

Why Your Doctor Should Be Part of This Conversation

Most parents think of swim lessons as a registration form, not a medical conversation. But your child's pediatrician has context you might not.

They know whether your child has an ear condition that requires special precautions in the water. They know if there's a heart condition, a seizure disorder, or a developmental delay that changes what "water ready" looks like. They know your child's physical development and whether the skills required for swim lessons align with where your child actually is.

A quick check-in before swim season isn't about getting a permission slip. It's about getting the full picture.

Bring these questions to your next well visit:

- Is my child physically ready to start swim lessons?
- Are there any health conditions I should flag to an instructor before we start?
- What level of instruction makes sense for where my child is developmentally?
- Are there any water environments we should avoid or approach carefully?
- At what age do you recommend starting formal lessons for kids like mine?

The answers help you make smarter, more confident choices all summer long.

When Can Kids Start Learning to Swim?

The [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) updated its guidance to say that most children can begin formal swim lessons as early as age 1 — a shift from an older recommendation that held off until age 4. But "can start" and "is ready" aren't always the same thing.

Readiness depends on a child's physical development, comfort in the water, and ability to follow simple instructions. Some 1-year-olds are fearless and physically capable. Others need more time, and that's completely normal.

Your pediatrician can help you sort through that nuance not just what the guidelines say, but what's right for your child specifically.

Lessons Are Step One, Not the Finish Line

Swim lessons are one of the most powerful tools we have. Research shows that [formal swim instruction](#) can reduce drowning risk by up to 88% in children ages 1 to 4. That's a remarkable number.

But lessons alone don't make a child drown-proof. Supervision is still the single most important safety factor but it has to be active, undistracted, eyes-on-the-water supervision. Not scrolling-your-phone supervision or glancing-up-every-few-minutes supervision.

Layers of protection matter too:

- **Fencing:** A four-sided [pool fence](#) with a self-latching gate reduces drowning risk significantly. The CDC recommends fences at least 4 feet high on all sides of a home pool.
- **Life jackets:** [Coast Guard-approved](#) life jackets, not floaties or arm bands, are essential for open water, boats, and any situation where a child may be in over their head.
- **Touch supervision for young children:** For kids under 5 or those still developing swimming skills, an adult should be within arm's reach any time they're near water.
- **CPR training:** Every parent and caregiver should know hands-only CPR. It takes about 30 minutes to learn and can mean everything in an emergency. [Find a class near you here.](#)

A Note on Older Kids

It's tempting to think water safety conversations are only for toddlers. But drowning doesn't stop being a risk once a child can swim a lap.

Older kids face a different set of risks such as open water, peer pressure, overconfidence, and unfamiliar conditions like currents and cold temperatures. Teenagers drown too, and their deaths are often linked to the false sense of security that comes from knowing how to swim.

A conversation with your pediatrician about lake swimming, boating, and diving is still worth having. And pair it with a direct conversation with your kids: no swimming alone, no diving in unfamiliar water, life jackets on boats — every time.

You Set the Tone

Kids take their cues from us. When you treat water safety as a serious conversation,

something you research, talk through with your doctor, and build real habits around, your child learns to respect it too.

That doesn't mean making the pool a source of anxiety. Swimming is a joy. It's a life skill. It's one of the best things kids can do for their bodies, their confidence, and their independence.

It just means going in prepared. And that starts with a conversation in your pediatrician's office before summer kicks into high gear.

The Science of Boredom: Why Unscheduled Summers Make Smarter Kids

It's the words every parent dreads as summer break barely gets started: "I'm bored."

The instinct is immediate: find a camp, a class, a playdate. Boredom feels like a problem; a gap in the schedule that reflects poorly on how intentional we're being as parents.

But that instinct, while completely understandable, may be working against your child.

Boredom isn't a problem. It's a process. And the science behind what happens in a child's brain when they're left to their own devices is genuinely surprising.

What's Actually Happening When Kids Are "Doing Nothing"

When a child is bored and truly unstimulated, with no screen to reach for and no activity scheduled, their brain doesn't go quiet. It gets busy.

Neuroscientists [call it the default mode network](#): a system of brain regions that activates specifically when we're not focused on an external task. It's associated with imagination, self-reflection, empathy, future planning, and creative problem-solving.

The moments that feel like "nothing" are actually some of the most productive their developing brain experiences.

A [2019 study published in the Academy of Management Discoveries](#) found that participants who experienced boredom before a creative task generated significantly more creative ideas than those who were kept engaged beforehand. The bored brain, it turns out, is a searching brain, and that search drives innovation.

For kids, this plays out in the backyard, the bedroom floor, and the long car ride with nothing to do. It's where stories get invented, games get created, and kids figure out who they are when no one is directing them.

The Overscheduled Summer and What It Costs

There's nothing wrong with camps, classes, and structured activities. Many parents don't get summer break and still have to work. Team sports build character. Enrichment programs open

doors. These things matter.

But when every hour of a child's summer is accounted for and they move from one organized activity to the next without breathing room, something gets quietly crowded out.

[Research from Sandra Hofferth at the University of Maryland](#) tracked how children's time use changed between 1981 and 1997 and found that as structured activities increased, free play and unstructured time declined sharply. It's only accelerated since.

What gets lost in an over-scheduled childhood:

- **The ability to self-direct.** Kids who are always told what to do next struggle to generate their own motivation when structure disappears in college, at work, in adult life.
- **Tolerance for discomfort.** Boredom is mildly uncomfortable. Learning to sit with that discomfort and move through it is a skill. Kids who are never bored never build it.
- **Intrinsic curiosity.** When learning is always organized, children can lose touch with what they actually find interesting. Unstructured time is where passions get discovered.
- **Conflict resolution.** Free play among kids (especially unsupervised play) is where children negotiate, argue, compromise, and figure out how to repair relationships. There's no adult referee, and that's the point.

Boredom and the Brain: The Developmental Case

[The American Academy of Pediatrics](#) has been clear for years: unstructured, child-directed play is not optional for healthy development. It's essential.

Free play supports the development of executive function, the set of cognitive skills that includes working memory, flexible thinking, and self-control. They're the skills most predictive of academic success and life outcomes, and they're built not through worksheets, but through kids navigating their own play.

[A Harvard study](#) on executive function describes it plainly: the brain builds these capacities through practice. That practice happens naturally when kids direct their own play and work through problems without an adult stepping in.

Boredom is essentially the on-ramp to all of that. It's the moment of friction that precedes self-direction and when parents resist the urge to resolve it, they're giving their child's brain exactly what it needs.

This Isn't About Doing Less — It's About Doing It Differently

Letting kids be bored doesn't mean abandoning them or clearing your entire summer calendar. It means being intentional about leaving space.

What that looks like in practice:

- **Build in “free blocks” with no plan attached.** Even two to three unscheduled hours a day gives kids room to explore, create, and self-direct. Resist the urge to fill them.
- **Say yes to the mess.** Unstructured time often looks chaotic from the outside: forts made from couch cushions, random art projects, elaborate games with made-up rules. That chaos is an engaged brain at work.
- **Hold off on the screen.** The moment a device is available, the boredom process short-circuits. Give it 20 minutes because that window is often where the magic happens.
- **Let them complain.** “I’m bored” is not a crisis. A calm “I hear you...what could you do about that?” is one of the most developmentally useful responses a parent can give. It redirects ownership back where it belongs.
- **Spend time outside with minimal structure.** Nature + no agenda is one of the most powerful combinations for creative, restorative play. It doesn’t have to be a hike; the backyard with a bucket and stick counts.

What the Best Summers Actually Look Like

Ask adults to recall their most vivid childhood summer memories, and rarely do they describe the structured ones.

They describe the creek they spent three weeks building a dam across. The neighborhood game that lasted an entire summer with evolving rules nobody wrote down. The long, hot afternoon they spent reading every book they could find because there was nothing else to do and discovered they loved it.

Those memories weren’t accidental. They came from time that hadn’t been filled yet.

This summer, the most valuable thing you can give your child isn’t a new activity. It’s an open afternoon and the confidence to let them figure out what to do with it.

The boredom won’t last long. But what grows out of it just might.

Heat Stroke Isn’t Just Dehydration... Every Parent Should Know the Difference

Most parents know the drill when a kid gets too hot at the beach or overheats at an outdoor birthday party. Hand them some water, find shade, and maybe a popsicle.

A lot of the time, that works, and kids cool down.

But sometimes it doesn’t. And knowing the difference between those two situations — the cold drink fix and the 911 call — is one of the most important things a parent can know during the dog days of summer.

Two Different Things That Look Similar at First

Heat exhaustion and heat stroke are not the same condition. They exist on a spectrum, and one can quickly become the other. Where your child falls on that spectrum determines your next move.

Heat exhaustion is the body's warning signal. It means your child is overheating and struggling to cool down, but their body is still fighting back. Signs include:

- Heavy sweating
- Cool, pale, or clammy skin
- Fast or weak pulse
- Nausea or vomiting
- Muscle cramps
- Tiredness, weakness, or dizziness
- Headache
- Fainting

At this stage, moving your child to a cool environment, removing excess clothing, and getting fluids in them can turn things around. [The CDC recommends](#) cool, damp cloths on the skin and sipping cool water or a sports drink with electrolytes.

If symptoms improve within 15 to 30 minutes, heat exhaustion was likely the culprit, and you handled it.

If they don't (or they get worse) you're no longer dealing with heat exhaustion.

When It Becomes an Emergency

Heat stroke is a medical emergency. It happens when the body's internal temperature reaches 103°F or higher and the cooling system essentially breaks down. Call 911.

The warning signs look different and some are easy to miss:

- **High body temperature (103°F or higher)**
- **Hot, red, dry, or damp skin — notably, sweating may stop entirely**
- **Rapid, strong pulse**
- **Confusion, slurred speech, or unusual behavior**
- **Loss of consciousness**
- **Seizures**

That sweating point matters. A hot child who stops sweating isn't just "dried out" — it can mean the body has lost its ability to regulate temperature. That's what makes heat stroke so dangerous.

According to the Mayo Clinic, untreated heat stroke can cause damage to the brain, heart, kidneys, and muscles. The longer it goes unaddressed, the more serious the damage becomes.

If you suspect heat stroke: call 911 immediately. While you wait, move your child to a cool environment and try to lower their body temperature. Apply cool wet cloths, ice packs to the neck, armpits, and groin, or immersion in cool (not ice cold) water if available.

Do not give fluids to a child who is confused or unconscious.

Who Is Most at Risk

Heat stroke can happen faster than most parents expect. Some children are especially vulnerable:

- **Infants and toddlers:** their bodies heat up three to five times faster than adults and they cannot communicate symptoms clearly
- **Children in hot cars:** a car's interior temperature can rise 20 degrees in just 10 minutes, even on a mild day. Never leave a child unattended in a vehicle, even briefly
- **Kids with chronic conditions:** heart conditions, obesity, kidney disease, or any condition affecting fluid balance can increase risk
- **Children on certain medications:** some antihistamines, diuretics, and psychiatric medications affect the body's ability to regulate heat. Ask your pediatrician if any of your child's medications fall into this category
- **Athletes and active kids:** kids pushing hard in heat and humidity can tip from heat exhaustion to heat stroke faster than they realize, especially if they're not accustomed to the conditions

When to Call Your Pediatrician vs. When to Go Straight to the ER

Call your pediatrician if:

- Your child shows signs of heat exhaustion that improve with rest and fluids but you want guidance
- Your child recovered but seems off: extra tired, not eating, or still complaining of headache after a few hours
- You're unsure whether what you observed was heat exhaustion or something else
- Your child has a chronic condition and you want to talk through heat safety precautions before they worsen

Go straight to the ER (or call 911) if:

- Your child's temperature is 103°F or higher
- They are confused, disoriented, or unusually difficult to wake
- They stop sweating despite still being very hot
- They have a seizure

- They lose consciousness at any point
- Symptoms from heat exhaustion are not improving after 30 minutes of cooling and hydration

When in doubt, call. A quick phone call to your pediatrician's after-hours line can help you make the decision — that's what they're there for.

What You Can Do Right Now

Prevention is always the better play. A few habits that make a real difference:

- **Hydrate before you go outside.** Don't wait until your child says they're thirsty. By the time they ask, they're likely already mildly dehydrated
- **Schedule outdoor time smartly.** The hottest, most dangerous hours are typically between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Build in shade breaks and cool-down time
- **Dress kids in lightweight, light-colored, loose clothing.** It makes a meaningful difference in how quickly they overheat
- **Know your child's personal risk factors.** If they have a condition or take a medication that affects heat tolerance, talk to your pediatrician before summer activities ramp up
- **Check the back seat.** Every time. Make it a non-negotiable habit regardless of how rushed or distracted you are

A Note on Trusting Your Instincts

Parents are often the first to notice when something is off. The glassy eyes, the sudden quiet, the kid who usually can't stop moving, who is now slumped in a chair.

Trust that. Heat-related illness moves fast in children, and acting early is almost always the right call.

Your job isn't to diagnose. It's to pay attention and then get the right people involved quickly when something doesn't feel right.

That's not overreacting. That's exactly what good parenting looks like.

RED, WHITE, AND BLUE CAKE

The no-bake Fourth of July dessert that looks like you tried really hard.

No oven. No stress. No reason to heat up the kitchen when it's 90 degrees outside. This one comes together in about 20 minutes, goes straight into the fridge, and comes out looking festive enough to earn real compliments. The kids can easily help layering cookies, spooning cream and scattering berries. By the time the fireworks start, dessert is already done. That's a win on every level.



DOWNLOAD TO SAVE THIS RECIPE FOR LATER

ENGAGE WITH US

What is your favorite Fourth of July memory from growing up?

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE

KEEP IN TOUCH

Follow Advocates for Healthy Kids for quick tips, fun updates, and real talk from fellow parents and our founder, Dr. Dunnavant. Get involved and help us keep our children safe and healthy!



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