Health hints to ease your family in to the fall season

Autumn is on the horizon and families everywhere are bracing for a return to school, work and hectic schedules. The sudden change can quickly sap energy levels, leaving both parents and kids tired, stressed and more prone to illness. Plan ahead with the hints below to ease the transition, ward off fatigue and anxiety, and keep your family in good health.



Get to bed earlier. By the end of the summer, children may be used to later nights and sleep-ins. Help kids readjust their internal clocks. Initiate earlier bed and wake-up times a couple of weeks before school starts. Most experts agree that children and teens require a minimum of nine hours of sleep to stay healthy and alert at school.

Eat well. Make sure the family has a balanced breakfast. The hype around breakfast being the most important meal of the day is true. A balanced breakfast is the ultimate brain booster. Studies show it improves concentration, attitude and performance in young and old alike, and can reduce trips to the doctor's office. For all meals and snacks it's best to steer clear of fast and processed foods, which tend to be high in fat and salt and, low in essential nutrients and fibre. Follow *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating.*

Boost the immune system. Make sure everyone is up to date with vaccinations. Create a chart noting immunization dates to remind you when family members are due for shots. Immunizations can greatly reduce the risk of illnesses such as whooping cough, measles and chicken pox, which can leave victims bed-ridden for weeks.

Wash your hands. It's simple, and one of the most effective ways to ward off colds and flu. Teach children to wash their hands after they use the washroom and before and after meals. For situations where a sink is not at hand, carry moist wipes or antibacterial gel.

Get to know the school nurse or health representative. Ensure medical contact information is current and that your children's school nurse is aware of any medical conditions or allergies.

Take a breather. It's easy to get overwhelmed by work, studies, after school sports etc. Stress weakens the immune system, so releasing excess anxiety is a great way to stay healthy. Take a 20-minute walk, meditate, read the paper or listen to music. Discover an activity that lets you relax and re-energize. Encourage your kids to do the same.

Fall can be hectic, as families get back into the swing of busy lives. Consider ways to prepare for the changes ahead and avoid stress and illness. With these simple measures, fall can also be a good time to renew commitments to a healthier family and lifestyle.