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Expert Contributor: Back to school tips

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While I am now an empty nester as my youngest heads off to college, I clearly remember the first day of pre-school, and some of the struggles in between. Whether your child is attending school for the first time or well on their way, here are some tips gathered from experts to help them get the most out of their school experience.

Encourage ample sleep – It can be difficult to switch quickly from our carefree summer sleep schedules to the optimum hours of sleep each night, if an earlier rising time is necessary for school. Sleep experts recommend moving the schedule back 15-30 minutes per evening to help your child more easily adapt to an earlier bedtime. Guidelines for recommended hours of sleep per day for children, based on age, are available from the American Academy of Pediatrics on their website at aap.org.

Establish predictable routines – As parents, we know that infants and toddlers thrive when they know what to expect, and quite frankly most of us do as well. Routines will change as our children age, with later bed times, more choices, and obligations. When our children become better communicators and negotiators, it can be more difficult to stick to basic routines that we know are really for the best. As for me, my brain knows when I should head to bed, though I often have trouble resisting the next episode on Netflix when it starts to autoplay.

Provide nourishing food – While we can't always get our children to eat what we'd like, working within their preferences is a great way to encourage healthy eating. If they only like one vegetable, or chicken nuggets every day, packing the items that make a balanced meal, though perhaps not your favorites, will help them have the energy to focus during school. Providing some protein for breakfast, whether it's yogurt, eggs, or refried beans, is a great way to set them up for a successful start to their day. Luckily, there are many blogs and cookbooks to help increase the nutrients in recipes, without picky eaters finding out!

Preserve unscheduled time – We all want great opportunities for our children, perhaps hoping to give them ones that we enjoyed or wished we had during our youth. With the incredible array of choices today, many families find themselves feeling stressed by trying to fit it all in. Many child health experts are suggesting putting unscheduled time into your child's daily and weekly schedule so they can slow down and recharge. It's a great way for them to learn about living a balanced lifestyle.