

Family Life

July 2017
A Special Supplement to
Bladen Journal

Building an Eco-Friendly Family

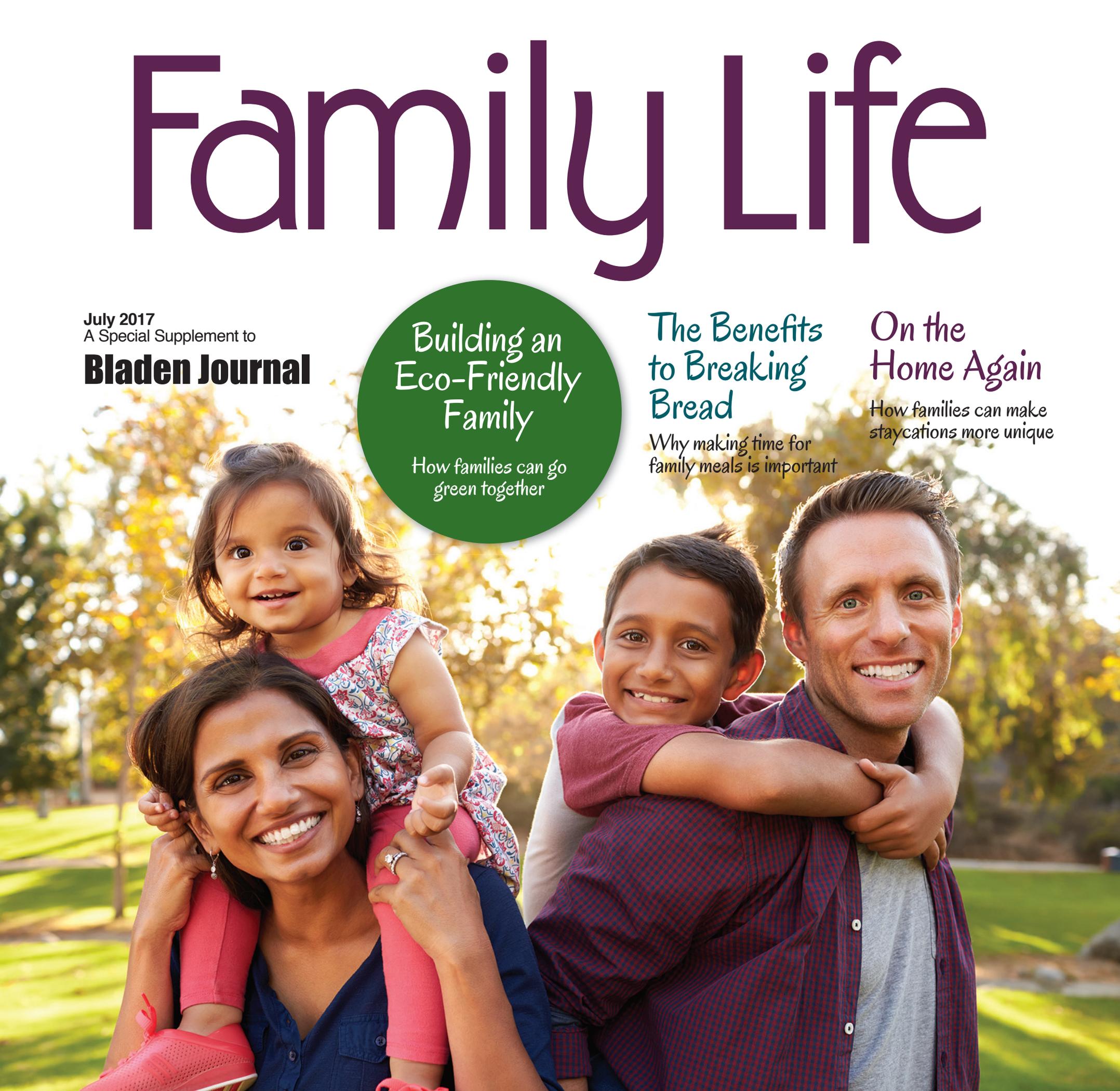
*How families can go
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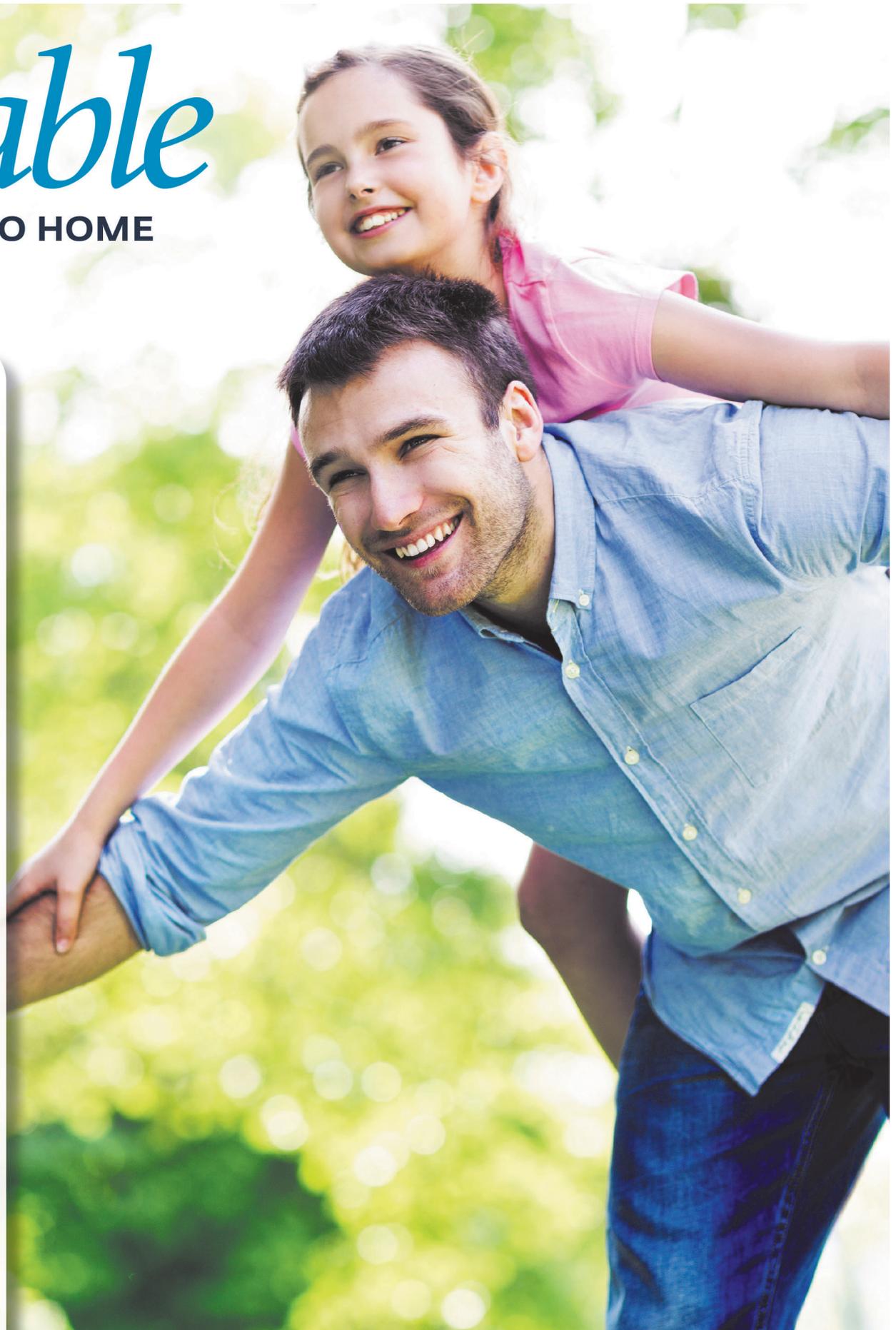
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Why making time for family meals is important

Family meals are about much more than what is served for dinner. Research indicates that spending time together around the table as a family promotes a host of benefits. Family meals have been linked to improved communication skills, healthier bodies and even academic advantages for school-aged children. Harvard researchers conducted a long-term study to look at the effects of various components of family life to see which had the most profound impact on children's development. When compared to story time, family events or even playtime, family dinners offered the most benefits.

According to The Family Dinner Project, a nonprofit organization currently operating from the offices of Project Zero at Harvard University, recent studies link regular family meals with the kinds of behaviors that parents desire for their children.

These can include

- improved academic performance,
- high self-esteem,
- low risk of substance abuse,
- low risk of depression,
- reduced chances of teen pregnancy,
- low rates of obesity, and
- low likelihood of developing eating disorders.

Even though scheduling conflicts can sometimes make family meals difficult, 59 percent of families report eating dinner together five times a week, according to the "Importance of Family Dinner IV" report. Including the above benefits, here are some more reasons to gather around the dinner table four or more times a week.

Designated family time: Family meals allow kids to count on spending time with their parents. Consider turning off all electronic devices and make dinner time all about conversation. Such discussions can improve cognitive skills and linguistic development.

Decreased food pickiness: A 2000 survey from the Obesity Epidemiology and Prevention Program at Harvard Medical School found that kids between the ages of nine and 14 who ate dinner with their families ate more fruits and vegetables and therefore consumed higher amounts of many key nutrients. Family meals are a great opportunity to introduce new, healthy foods.

Controlled portions: Eating at home can help curb calories, fat and salt consumption by giving families greater control over the ingredients in their meals.

Discussed problems: Children who routinely eat with their parents may be more inclined to discuss problems that can, if hidden, develop into serious illnesses, such as depression or eating disorders.

Curbed dangerous behaviors: Eating family dinners at least five times a week drastically lowers a teen's chance of smoking, drinking and using drugs, according to Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children.

Good grades: Twenty percent of children who eat with their family fewer than three times a week get C's or lower on their report cards, according to CASA. Only 9 percent of teens who eat frequently with their families do this poorly in school.

Relieved stress: Adults benefit from family dinners, too. Sitting down to a meal can reduce tension and strain among working parents. Family meals are important for a number of reasons. By understanding the benefits, families can increase their chances of sitting down together for food and conversation.

Weekly meal plans may save money



Meal plans provide a clever way to save money on food. Knowing the meals that will be made and which ingredients need to be purchased for these recipes eliminates floundering and impulse purchases at the supermarket. Knowing exactly what to buy and when also can eliminate food waste and spoilage. According to research from the University of Pennsylvania, people who can avoid impulse spending can save up to 23 percent on their grocery bills.

Planning meals in advance can also provide a host of health benefits. When meals are planned in advance, shoppers have more control over the ingredients they choose and can tailor them to specific dietary needs or healthy eating plans.

Fortunately, time-pressed individuals have a number of resources at their disposal to help them plan and shop for meals. A quick online search for weekly meal plans will yield many results, including recipes and complementary shopping lists. People also can download apps that help with meal planning to their smartphones. Such apps include Yummly, Pepperplate and MealBoard, among others.

Another way for individuals to plan meals more effectively is to take a few moments on the weekend to think about which meals to make during the week ahead. Compare the necessary ingredients against those you may already have in your pantry.

The rest can be purchased and saved for subsequent meals. Buying a week's worth of groceries in one shopping trip is more efficient and can help to conserve fuel. When planning meals, try to use the most perishable items first. For example, prepare to use seafood, some dairy items and fresh vegetables early in the week, and more durable foods, such as frozen, boxed or canned goods, later in the week. When buying foods at the store, buy proteins in bulk and subdivide them into smaller packages to save money. Properly repackage foods so they will not spoil or become freezer burned, leading to waste. Other budget-conscious shopping tips include trying store brands, building meal plans around items that are on sale that week and making use of coupons or coupon apps.

Post a weekly meal plan on or near the refrigerator so items can be thawed and ingredients prepared as needed. Building meals around slow cooker recipes also can help those who like to prep foods in the morning and then come home to completely cooked meals. On busy nights, arrange for fast meals, such as sandwiches or one-pot creations. By planning meals in advance, home cooks never have to stand in front of the pantry wondering what to make.



Teaching youngsters to brush their teeth without the faucet running is one way parents can encourage their kids to embrace an eco-friendly lifestyle.

How families can go green together

Interest in eco friendly lifestyles has long since spread beyond environmentalists and activists and has become a goal for people from all walks of life. Going green can even be done as a family. Families have multiple incentives to embrace an eco-friendly lifestyle. Going green can protect the planet for younger members of the family who will have to confront the consequences of today's decisions for decades to come. Going green also can save families money the moment they decide to change their lifestyles, providing a more immediate incentive. Families interested in making their efforts to be more eco-friendly a team effort can embrace the following strategies.

Wash clothes in cold water. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, heating water accounts for roughly 90 percent of the energy washing machines require to clean clothes. By washing clothes exclusively in cold water, families can drastically reduce the energy their washing machines consume, and clothes will still be clean at the end of each wash cycle.

Wash only in full loads. Whether washing clothes or washing dishes, families who want to go green together can resolve to only run their washing machines or dishwashers when both are full. The EPA notes that only doing full loads of laundry can save more than 3,400 gallons of water each year. When washing

dishes, do only full loads but avoid overcrowding the dishwasher. Overcrowding might mean some dishes are not thoroughly cleaned, which may require running another load or washing them by hand, both of which can be wasteful.

Turn off the faucets when brushing teeth. Another way families can pitch in to conserve energy and save money together is by turning off the faucets when they brush their teeth. Parents of young children can brush their teeth with their youngsters in the morning and at night, explaining to them how brushing without the faucet running can save untold gallons of water every year. This will conserve water and lower the monthly water bill.

Hang energy saving curtains. Energy-saving curtains reduce the amount of heat that passes through windows when the weather outside is cold, keeping more warm air inside and reducing the need to hike up the thermostat. In the summertime, heat from the outside may pass through window glass easily, but it's far more difficult for heat to pass through fabric. By hanging energy-saving curtains together with their children, parents can explain how the curtains are more than just decorative; they are also a helpful ally in protecting the planet. Going green together as a family can help parents save money and provide a valuable teaching opportunity that can benefit youngsters and the planet for years to come.

Did you know?

Playgrounds are meant to be entertaining outdoor respites and places where children can engage in some much-needed fun and exercise. But playgrounds also can be the sites of serious injury and may even contribute to child fatalities. The Consumer Product Safety Commission says that the four equipment pieces most often associated with injuries include climbers, swings, slides, and overhead ladders. The majority of injuries result from falls and equipment failure and take place more often in public playgrounds rather than home play areas. Injuries from playground falls can be serious, ranging from fractured bones to brain and spinal injuries. Deaths resulting from playground injuries are rare, especially in Canada, states Parachute, a national charitable organization dedicated to preventing injuries. Throughout North America, playground fatalities are most often caused by strangulation. To continue to make playground play safer, parents and children can:

- visit only those playgrounds that have safe, soft surfaces beneath the equipment,
- avoid clothing that has cords, drawstrings or straps, such as those on "hoodie" sweatshirts. Neck warmers are safer than scarves,
- ensure playground equipment is used only in the manner it was intended,
- supervise children at all times on the playground, and
- routinely inspect and maintain equipment.



How to encourage kids to take care of their teeth



Parents of young children know that getting kids to brush their teeth can sometimes feel like pulling teeth. Kids have a long history of disliking dental care, which can frustrate parents who know the importance and long-lasting benefits of proper dental hygiene. While many youngsters may never excitedly run to the bathroom to brush their teeth, parents can try various approaches to get kids to embrace proper dental care.

Start early. Parents should not hesitate to begin cleaning kids' teeth once the first tooth appears. The earlier dental care is part of a child's routine, the more likely he or she is to accept it as part of everyday life. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends using a soft-bristled brush with a

small head. Ideally, use a toothbrush designed for infants, brushing teeth once per day at bedtime. The AAPD advises taking kids to visit a pediatric dentist when the first tooth appears, or no later than the child's first birthday.

Make it a group effort. Young children love to imitate their parents' actions and behaviors, and moms and dads can use that adoration to their advantage when trying to get kids to brush their teeth. Brush teeth together as a family, making it seem like an enjoyable twice-daily activity. Get down on kids' level and show them how to brush. If kids are resistant, engage them in conversation while brushing so they don't even realize they're cleaning away.

Involve kids in choosing their dental care products. While parents should be mindful of the type of toothbrush their children use, always sticking with products recommended by their child's pediatric dentist, let youngsters choose their toothbrush and toothpaste. Kids might prefer a particular flavor of toothpaste, and a colorful toothbrush with a favorite film or television character might make kids more enthusiastic and less fussy about brushing.

Compliment kids after positive dental appointments. When pediatric dentist appointments go well, compliment children and express your pride in them for taking dental hygiene as seriously as they do.

How music and singing benefits children

Music is everywhere: on the radio, in movies and television shows and as a backdrop when shopping or celebrating milestones.

Music is an integral part of cultures all over the world. Music can express emotions not easily conveyed otherwise. It also provides a sense of community and belonging and can help unite the divided. Playing musical instruments or singing has a number of benefits. From the earliest days after their birth, children can be calmed by music. Music helps people work out their feelings and can be uplifting and comforting when people need a boost. While many people are familiar with the mood-enhancing benefits of music, they may not know that music also has developmental benefits. According to Don Campbell, internationally known educator and author of "The Mozart Effect for Children," music enhances intelligence, coordination, emotional expression, creativity, and socialization skills. Studies have suggested that music and movement affect all areas of development. Music can bolster listening skills, improve motor skills, assist with problem solving, and promote spatial-temporal reasoning. Many others say that music can calm and focus the mind, which is why it is so often employed by therapists.

In the book, "The Importance of Music," author Ellen Judson cites a 10-year study that tracked more than 25,000 middle and high school students. The study showed that students in music classes receive higher scores on standardized tests than students with little to no musical involvement.

In addition, singing and engaging in musical appreciation sharpens one's ability to communicate. Learning a piece of information attached to a tune will more readily embed that information in the brain. For example, many children learn the alphabet via song. Pairing lessons with song can help anyone retain information more easily.

Music also is fun, so much so that kids may not realize they're actually learning while singing. Matthew Freeman, development manager of "Sing up," a national singing project to help enhance music in children's education, states that children don't think of singing as work and may be more willing to participate. Song can be used to reinforce all different subjects, from language arts to mathematics.

Children or adults who are apprehensive about meeting new people can use music as a means to open the door to new friendships. Joining a choral group will immediately



introduce people to others who enjoy music as well. Group singing is less intimidating than singing alone, so it takes some of the pressure off of a person and can staunch performance anxiety.

Music is beneficial throughout one's life and can be an enjoyable way to make learning more fun.

How families can make staycations more unique

As a result of the economic downturn that began in 2008, many families found themselves forgoing traditional vacations in favor of “staycations.” In such instances, families spent time away from work and school together but did not travel far, if at all. While the economy has bounced back since the dawn of the staycation, many families are still choosing to stay at home in an effort to save money. Staycations might not seem as glamorous as traveling abroad or as relaxing as spending a week in an oceanfront resort or condominium, but there are ways for families to make staycations more fun and seem like a true departure from everyday life.

Experiment with new cuisine. One of the joys of travel is the opportunity to dine out and experience cuisine native to particular locales. But families don’t need to travel abroad to enjoy this particular benefit of traveling. The internet is home to a wealth of recipes from countries far and wide. Parents and their kids can choose recipes online and prepare meals from a different country each night, or pick a “country or

region of the week” and prepare a different dish native to that area each night. This provides a great departure from ordinary family dinners and can make for a fun activity for the whole family.

Experimenting in the kitchen during a staycation can give families the feeling of dining out that they enjoy on more traditional vacations.

Camp out. Straying from the norm, even when staying at home, can make staycations seem more like a vacation than merely a week away from school or the office. Parents who want to add a dash of adventure to their families’ staycations can set up tents in the backyard and sleep under the stars or seek out local campsites that are free or relatively inexpensive. Tell stories around a backyard firepit when staying at home to provide a more authentic camping experience for everyone.

Take in local culture. Rather than spending the week lounging around the house or the backyard pool, families can explore the cultural opportunities in their



towns or cities. Busy families tend to take such opportunities for granted when they get caught up in the daily grind, and exploring local history and artistic opportunities in the same way you would when traveling can provide a sense of excitement similar to that experienced during more traditional vacations. Visit a local zoo, take in a performance at a local theater company or take a guided historical tour of an area of your hometown or a nearby city.

Indulge in an extraordinary activity. While families typically choose staycations

to save money, forgetting the budget to enjoy one extraordinary activity can make a staycation more fun and memorable. Spend one day during the staycation doing something the family would not ordinarily do, be it visiting an all-day amusement park, taking a helicopter tour of a nearby city or going to a ballgame. Such a break from the norm, even if it’s only for a single night, can make staycations feel more like vacations. Staycations have become an economic necessity for many families, and there are many ways for parents to make such times as enjoyable and unique as more traditional vacations.

Plan for a successful family vacation

Vacations provide a chance to rest, recharge and experience new locales. Family vacations also provide an opportunity to make lasting memories parents and their children will remember forever. According to the 2016 American Express Spending and Saving Tracker, 70 percent of Americans expected to travel for leisure in 2016. In addition, the Family Travel Association notes that between 35 and 40 percent of family travel is multigenerational. That means extended families comprise a large part of the travel market, even if trips are not associated with traditional family vacations. “Experimental travel,” or visiting locations that stray from the norm, has grown in popularity as people are more concerned with experiences than simply seeing



a particular location. Family trips are one of the fastest-growing segments of the tourism industry. Families traveling together can heed the following advice to ensure their next trip is successful.

Be flexible with travel dates. Traveling during off-peak seasons can mean fewer crowds and lower prices. Consider taking the kids out of school during a random week of the year rather than during scheduled breaks, such as winter vacation or spring break. Prices often spike during popular travel times and dip during less popular times, such as when kids are in school.

Consider a vacation rental. Look beyond the traditional hotel for accommodations. Prices on private rentals may be comparable or less expensive while providing travelers with more space. This is especially valuable to large families who want a little more breathing room. Kids can retreat to one area while the adults hang out in another, something that may not always be possible in standard hotels. Renting a condo or home with a kitchen also means families can prepare their own meals, which helps to curb costs.

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Whether it's kayaking, running, golfing, getting back on the dance floor or just being able to carry your child on your back, we know how important movement is. Whatever it is that moves you forward, we can help you get there. That's because we know that good medicine is about more than just one-size-fits-all approaches. It's about listening to your needs, your concerns, and crafting a plan together that will get you back to feeling whole again as quickly and as safely as possible. We believe in listening. We believe in compassion. Simply put, we believe in better care.

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