

WISCONSIN TWIN RESEARCH NEWSLETTER



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Summer Health and Safety for Kids

Many summer activities take place outdoors, so it is important to protect ourselves and our children from sun burn, heat related illness, insects bites, and water related injuries.

Sun Exposure

Unprotected exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays can cause skin damage, eye damage, immune system suppression, and even cancer. Most people receive 50 to 80 % of their lifetime sun exposure before the age of 18. Those children at the greatest risk of being harmed by the sun are those with moles on their skin (or whose parents have a tendency to develop moles), very fair skin and hair, or a family history of skin cancer. Using sunscreens and limiting sun exposure can reduce the risk of developing skin cancer.

Sunburn develops when the amount of UV exposure is greater than what can be protected by the skin's melanin. Melanin is a chemical in our bodies that protects the skin cells from the radiation of the sun. The lighter your children's skin, the less melanin it has to absorb UV rays and protect itself. Sunscreens can increase the amount of time a person can be in the sun without getting sun burned. It is important to remember that babies' skin is delicate and burns very easily because they have thinner skin and underdeveloped melanin. Babies also have proportionately more skin for their body size compared to an adult. It is recommended that sunscreens not be used on children under 6 months of age because of the potential for absorbing large amounts of the chemicals used in sunscreen.

"Sun Safe" behaviors, which can protect your children from being harmed by the sun, include:

- Limiting sun exposure between 10am and 4pm (when the sun's rays are the strongest).
- Wearing protective light weight clothing that covers the body (wide-brimmed hats, sunglasses, long-sleeved shirts and

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Finding a Pediatrician

Finding the right pediatrician for your twins is a big decision. After all, this will be the doctor who will care for them through their most crucial years of development. A parent must consider many factors when choosing a pediatrician. This article is intended to help you focus on the key factors:

A good reference for finding the right pediatrician is the obstetrician who helped you through your twin pregnancy. He or she already knows the special needs of your twins and should be able to refer you to a physician who can meet those needs. Nursing staff in the hospital might also be knowledgeable references.

After you have a list of potential pediatricians, check with the Federation Of State Medical Boards (FSMB) to see if there have been any serious disciplinary actions or professional peer reviews filed against the pediatricians on your list. The FSMB website- www.FSMB.org- has links to the Wisconsin physicians web page. You can also call them at 1-817-868-4000 to get the number for the Wisconsin medical board.

Before choosing a permanent pediatrician, it is a good idea to briefly interview several

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long pants).

- Using sunscreens for children 6 months of age or older with SPF of 15 or greater.
- Avoiding strenuous activity during peak sunlight hours.
- Keeping babies under 6 months out of the sun.

Heat cramps, Heat Stroke, Heat Exhaustion, and Dehydration

Our bodies generate an incredible amount of heat. Normally, we cool ourselves by sweating and radiating heat through our skin. In times of unusually high temperatures, high humidity, or vigorous exercise in hot weather, our natural cooling system may become overwhelmed by the combination of heat and dehydration.

Heat-related illnesses usually come in stages. The **first** stage consists of heat cramps. These are brief, severe cramps in the muscles of the legs, arms, or abdomen that are painful but not serious. Children are especially susceptible to these when they have not been drinking enough fluids. The **second** stage is heat exhaustion which is a more severe heat illness that is comprised of intense thirst (dehydration), fatigue, weakness, flushed and clammy skin, and a lack of perspiration. The **final** stage of a heat-related illness is Heatstroke and definitely the most dangerous stage. Symptoms consist of a body temperature of 105 degrees F or higher, headache, dizziness, disorientation, agitation, or confusion, sluggishness, hot, dry skin, loss of consciousness and/or seizure.

If your children experience heatstroke or exhaustion, quickly move them to a cooler place and apply wet cloths to the forehead and torso. If a bath is drawn make it cool NOT cold. Cold water will cause shivering and actually increase their temperature. If they are conscious and can breathe without difficulty and are able to swallow give them salt water. DO NOT give them plain water if they are experiencing heatstroke. If their condition does not improve or worsens call 911. Prevention is the key when it comes to a heat-related illness and the best prevention method is to drink plenty of fluids, even if you don't feel thirsty.

Water Safety

Water play in the bathtub, pool, or beach can be a lot of fun but it can also be dangerous. Here are some healthy tips to make water time safe and fun.

- Doctors now advise **AGAINST** swimming lessons for infants and toddlers since their bodies are not yet good at fighting some diseases that are easily passed in the water. Therefore try to minimize the amount of pool or

beach water your baby swallows because it could make them sick.

- NEVER leave a young child alone near water, even for a minute. Babies can drown in less than 2 inches. Remember that buckets and bowls of water are dangerous for small children too.
- Teach children to wait for an adult before getting into water. Floating toys are fun but they are no parental substitute.
- NEVER leave a pool half-covered. A child could get trapped under the cover.
- Teach your children proper pool-side behavior and don't allow running or rough play around the pool.
- Learn First Aid and CPR so you are prepared for any type of accident. Ask your doctor or local American Red Cross about classes.

Biting Insects

Minimizing exposure to biting insects reduces the risk of diseases like malaria, yellow fever, and Japanese encephalitis. Preventive measures include the use of insect repellants, insecticide room sprays, mosquito netting, and screened windows.

One of the most common ingredients in insect repellants is DEET. DEET can be absorbed through the skin and may have some harmful side effects if used in high concentrations. Laboratory tests have shown that up to 56 percent of applied DEET can be absorbed through the skin. Small children are especially susceptible to DEET because they are more likely to accidentally ingest DEET and have lower body weights. Three-fourths of all DEET poisonings occur in children under six years of age. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that repellents with no more than 6 to 10% DEET be applied to children over the age of two. Adults should select repellents with no more than 30%. Among the brands that meet the AAP's standard are Skedaddle! Insect Protection for children and Off! Skintastic Fragrance-Free.

Safe application of insect repellents includes:

- Trying to concentrate on lower parts of the body, where many biting insects focus their attacks.
- NEVER applying repellant to a child's hands, which will invariably wind up in their mouth and eyes.
- Do not allow small children to apply the product themselves.
- Do not use under clothing.
- Light, long sleeved clothing and long pants should be worn for excursions into fields. Pant cuffs should be tucked into socks and every evening search for and remove ticks from clothing and skin.

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candidates. Some questions to ask and points to consider include:

a. What hospital are you affiliated with? It is important that you feel comfortable with this hospital in the event that your child must go there to be treated for an illness or emergency.

b. What is your specialty? Often a pediatrician will have an area of specialization. If one or both of your twins has a specific medical problem, will this pediatrician know how to treat them? Does the pediatrician have training or experience in twin health care?

c. What are the costs of care? Find out which services are covered by your insurance and make sure your pediatrician can bill your insurance provider.

d. Do you want a female or male doctor? As children get older, they tend to prefer doctors who are of their same sex.

e. Do you want an older doctor or a younger doctor? Older doctors have experience, but might retire before your child matures or might not embrace new trends or technology. Younger doctors lack years of experience, but tend to be trained in the latest treatments and technological advancements.

f. Will you have access to your doctor for questions on non-urgent matters, and if not, what is the training of the person who is designated to answer these questions? Often a busy pediatrician will train a nurse practitioner or medical assistant to answer the non-urgent day-to-day questions. As long as there is close communication between these professionals, this is usually satisfactory.

Some observations to make and questions to ask when you visit the clinic for the first time:

a. Does the office appear clean and safe, a place you would let your child crawl around?

b. Is the staff friendly and helpful? Do you feel comfortable letting the staff hold your baby?

c. Does the office have a laboratory and if so which tests can be run there?

d. What are routine childcare checks and when are they scheduled? The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends checkups by one month, and at 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 15, and 24 months.

e. Is there a separate waiting area for sick and well children? Many pediatric practices have only one waiting area. Young children are always putting toys in their mouths. Allowing well and sick patients to play with the same toys is an easy way for germs to spread.

f. Is there a triage system for very sick children to get priority? What is the usual wait time when there are no emergencies?

g. Are there weekend and evening appointments for well care? If you are a working family this can be a very important consideration.

Once you have visited a Pediatrician, things to pay attention to include:

a. Is the pediatrician sensitive to the differences between singleton and twin development? Does he or she seem to understand the needs of your twins?

b. Does the pediatrician over treat your child for simple ailments, running a battery of tests that rack up your bills?

c. Does the pediatrician get upset when you seek a second opinion?

d. Does he or she make you feel uncomfortable or stupid when you ask for additional details?

e. Does the staff make you feel uncomfortable when you call with concerns or emergencies?

f. Do you or your child feel uncomfortable with the pediatrician's bedside manner?

g. Does the pediatrician seem unwilling to listen to your concerns?

Allow yourself time to meet the right pediatrician. You'll gain piece of mind knowing that you have chosen the doctor that best meets your twins' health care needs.♥

How to Contact Us

By Mail: Wisconsin Twin Project
Waisman Center
University of Wisconsin-Madison
1500 Highland Avenue
Madison, WI 53705

By Phone:
(608) 265-2674

By E-mail:
klemery@facstaff.wisc.edu

"Raising Twins? Looking for Someone Else Who Really Understands?"

Of course you talk to other parents about raising kids, but do you ever feel like other parents don't really understand what it's like to raise twins? If your answer is yes, maybe you should plan on going to a twin convention to meet other parents of multiples.

There are many twin conventions throughout the country (and the world) including the infamous Twins Days Festival and a convention right here in Wisconsin. The annual Twin-O-Rama is held on the third weekend in July in Cassville, Wisconsin. This year the 56th Twin-O-Rama was held on July 14th, 15th, and 16th at the Riverside Park. Activities included a soap box derby race, a dance, volleyball, arts and crafts, a parade, and of course twin contests.

For more information on the 2001 convention you can visit their website at www.cassville.org/twin-o-rama.html, or write to Twin-O-Rama, Inc. P.O. Box 545, Cassville, WI 53806.

The Twins Days Festival takes place annually on the first weekend in August every year in Twinsburg, Ohio just south of Cleveland. This year they are celebrating "Reflection: 25 Years" on August 4th, 5th, and 6th. The Festival started in 1976 with 37 sets of twins, and in 1999 there were over 2700 registered sets of twins. This is by far the largest twin convention in the world and many twins and other multiples fly in from all over the world to attend.

For more information on Twins Days you can visit their website at www.twinsdays.org, or call the Twins Days Festival committee at (330) 425-3652.

There are many twin conventions throughout the United States including Michigan, Tennessee, New Jersey, and Louisiana. There are also many international conventions, including gatherings in Mexico, Canada, and France. So if this sounds like something that interests you, give it a try or call Penny at (608) 263-4735 for more information on these wonderful conventions for families just like yours.♥

Babyproofing Your Home

(This article is copied from "Parenting the First Year", published by the University of Wisconsin -Extension)

As a parent, it's your job to make baby's worlds a safe place for them to learn and grow. Babyproofing helps protect your babies from dangerous things in your home and helps protect your precious objects from damage.

Start by getting on your hands and knees and looking around your home from a baby's eye view. Watch out for:

Small or Sharp Things

*Anything babies can reach will go into their mouths. Keep floors and tables clear of popcorn, cigarettes, dustballs, coins, paperclips, staples, small balls- and anything smaller than 1½ inches that you wouldn't want them to eat. Inspect toys often. Safe toys can become dangerous when broken.

*If knobs on your television or stereo are small and come off, electronic stores sell larger ones.

*Keep window blind cords out of baby's reach, and do not put your baby's cribs near window blind or drapery cords- they can strangle your baby.

Poisons

If you can, move cleaning supplies to a high place. Put childproof locks on cupboards with dangerous chemicals. Children drink things just to try them, even if they taste bad. Some houseplants are poisonous.

If you have a party, pour left-over drinks down the sink. It takes very little alcohol to poison a child. Cigarettes can also poison children who eat them.

Medicine cabinets should lock. Don't take medicine in front of your children. Never tell babies medicine is "candy". In large amounts even aspirin or iron pills can kill. Keep the Poison Control Center phone number near your phone.

Electrical Things

Cover unused electrical outlets with plastic plugs you can buy at the hardware store. Keep lamp cords out of the way behind furniture. Move fans up high.

In the kitchen, don't leave cords dangling. Turn pot handles toward the back of the stove.

Plastic Bags and Balloons

The plastic bags covering dry-clean clothes are very dangerous. Babies can get any plastic bag over their mouths and nose and suffocate. Balloons can choke babies. Throw out broken balloons immediately.

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Stairs

Install safety gates at the top and bottom of open stairways. Be sure to keep gates fastened at all times when babies are around.

Valuables

Hide your valuables away for a while or move them to high shelves. It's easier to change your home than your babies, and it saves you saying "No, don't touch that."

Water

Keep toilet lids closed and avoid leaving buckets of water unattended while cleaning or washing the car.

Babyproofing When Babies Can Stand

Once your babies can stand, they can reach farther and higher. They can reach things that were out of reach before. If you can, keep them safe by taking them with you from room to room. Also, look at each room in your home again.

Watch for new hazards:

*When babies use furniture to pull themselves up, they may pull things over. Remove wobbly tables and lamps that could tip over. Fasten bookcases and dressers to the wall if they are not sturdy.

*Set your crib mattress to the lowest level. Remove bumper pads and large stuffed toys babies could step on to climb out.

*Be especially alert for dangling electric cords, table cloths or curtains that babies could pull down or get tangled in.

*Keep medicines, cleaners, pesticides, alcohol and other poisons locked out of baby's reach. This includes vitamins and iron supplements.

*Turn pot handles toward the back of the stove.

*Turn your water heater down to 120 degrees F (medium), as babies can be burned by water hotter than this. This saves money, too.

*Never leave your babies alone in or near water, even for a minute.

*Don't let babies stand up in the grocery cart at the store. You may be able to find a safety strap to keep them seated.

*Don't let babies stand up in their high chairs.

*Watch out for things that pinch fingers, such as door hinges or folding chairs.

Surviving the 12 to 18 month old

There's a lot of talk about the 2-year-old and the 3-year-old. But, sometimes we forget what happens between 12 and 18 months. This period can truly test your flexibility, patience, and sense of humor.

Why? Because there's no simple way to allow babies this age to explore safely or to make them obey your requests. Your children love to explore and need to explore to learn. But, it's so easy to get into trouble. You'll need to keep watch constantly. This is not easy, but an important responsibility.

Babyproofing is Vital

Babyproof your home by removing anything children can get hurt with, and anything easily broken. This may mean storing the glass coffee table, and moving plants up high for a while. It definitely means putting cleaning supplies, medicines, cigarettes, guns and alcohol out of reach. A locked cabinet is best.

This same advice applies to the homes of grandparents, other relatives, friends, babysitters, and any other place your child spends time.

When children can walk- even if only by hanging onto furniture- many more things can be harmful:

Water: Mop buckets, open toilets, bathtubs, hot tubs and pool.

Stairs

Sharp edges or corners

Toddlers often grab and pull things down off tables or counters. They often put small objects in their mouths and can easily choke.

To see everything from baby's height, you may want to crawl around your home again. Look at everything to see what needs to be moved or changed.

With children this age, it's impossible to keep a home neat and clean. When accidents happen, understand that your babies are not trying to be mean. They may be a little over-enthusiastic, but they are not being naughty on purpose.

Keep playpen time short and avoid saying "no" too often. Instead, give your children a large babyproof area to explore and strengthen muscles needed for walking and running.

Consider the changes you make in your home today as a way to help your children grow up happy and safe. Keep in mind that over time children will learn to be responsible. ♦

Looking for Twins with Autism

We estimate that there are approximately 40-50 pairs of twins under the age of 18 years in Wisconsin in which one or both twins has autism, or some other form of pervasive developmental disorder (PDD-NOS or Aspergers Syndrome). We have great personal and scientific interest in this disorder and we are considering the feasibility of conducting a research study using twins to help understand this complex disorder.

However, the feasibility of this research will depend on our being able to document that a sufficient number of parents of twins with autism would be willing to participate in the research. We would appreciate a phone call from the parents of any twin with autism

(identical or fraternal, boy or girl, regardless of whether the cotwin has any disorder or not) living anywhere in the state of Wisconsin. We need to hear from these individuals during July or August, 2000, but the research would not begin until 2001, at which time full details of the study would be available. We would appreciate newsletter readers mentioning our efforts to other parents of twins with autism spectrum disorders who might qualify. All that we want to know at this time is the age and diagnosis of the twins, as well as contact information for the future.

Hill Goldsmith, Ph.D.
Psychology Department
1202 W Johnson St.
University of Wisconsin
Madison WI, 53706

Wisconsin Twin Project
Waisman Center
University of Wisconsin-Madison
1500 Highland Avenue
Madison, WI 53705

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

