

## CHAPTER 10 ACUTE HEALTH CONDITIONS & INJURIES

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#### Promoting Healthy Lifestyles

The primary role of the school nurse is to promote healthy lifestyles for the students, staff members and community. The practice of healthy lifestyles will help avoid many acute health conditions and injuries. Even chronic health conditions can sometimes be prevented or mitigated by practicing healthy lifestyle choices.

Healthy lifestyle choices start the night before by getting adequate sleep. The amount of sleep required does vary by age.

The National Sleep Foundation makes the following recommendations for sleep by age:

Age	Sleep Needs
Newborns (0-2 months)	12 to 18 hours
Infants (3 – 11 months)	14 to 15 hours
Toddlers (1-3 years)	12 to 13 hours
Preschoolers (3-5 years)	11 to 13 hours
School-age children (5 – to 10 years)	10 to- 11 hours
Teens (10 – to 17 years)	8.5 to 9:25 hours
Adults	7 to 9 hours

The next healthy habit to encourage is for students and staff members to eat a healthy breakfast. This should include a variety of food with an appropriate balance of proteins, carbohydrates, and healthy fats. Many schools offer school breakfast or after the bell options as well. Investigators have found a strong connection between good nutrition and good grades. (<http://prowellness.vhost.psu.edu/study-links-school-breakfast-program-to-better-academic-achievement>)

Students, staff members and community members need to brush their teeth using a fluoride-containing toothpaste for two minutes twice a day. Students can start flossing their teeth while they are still in Elementary School, so this will be a habit as they go through life.

Another healthy habit to encourage is for students and staff members as well as community members to wear seat belts and use appropriate child safety seats when riding in a vehicle.

When students are riding on a bus, they need to follow the bus rules for safety such as staying in their seats, not throwing items and rules for windows being open or not.

Students need to practice safe habits of playing safely when at recess, physical education (PE) class or weight training classes. When students don't practice safety or follow safety rules in these situations, injuries often occur.

Students, staff members and community members need to practice good methods of preventing spread of disease also. This includes washing hands with soap and water multiple times per day in appropriate situations such as before and after preparing food, before eating, after playing with animals or playing outside or anytime the hands appear soiled.

Students, staff members and community members need to be physically active every day. Choosing something the whole family can enjoy helps all family members be healthier by getting physical activity on a regular basis.

Making healthy food choices helps students learn better and be healthier. Healthy food helps students grow physically and mentally as well as providing key nutrients to help them be at their healthiest.

As students, staff members and community members practice positive outlooks, their health will improve as well. Healthy people learn to be satisfied with their best efforts, not jealous of others or blaming others. Practicing forgiveness improves mental health. Let the past be in the past and move forward for a positive future. Gratitude also helps people stay healthy.

## **Acute Health Conditions**

Many of the acute health conditions seen in the school nurse's office tend to be minor – headaches or stomachaches – for instance and can be assessed and treated. Sometimes these are symptoms of something much more serious though and so a thorough nursing assessment is always warranted. Minor injuries again by assessing the student, may be treated in the nurse's office or may warrant medical attention.

There are typically three common outcomes from a student's visit to the nurse's office:

- Assessment indicates student's complaint can be treated and the student can return to class.
- Assessment indicates student may have a communicable disease and needs to be excluded – the parent/guardian is contacted and asked to provide arrangements for the student to go home.
- Assessment indicates the student is experiencing a health emergency and needs to be transported to the nearest Emergency Department.

It is best practice to have plans in place for when a student will be excluded – for instance if the student is showing signs and symptoms of a communicable disease. Parents need to know what the plan is for excluding students. This is good information to share at the beginning of the school year with possible reminders sent out or featured on your School District’s website from time to time. A plan helps all students to be treated fairly and won’t result in one student being excluded for a condition while another student with a similar condition is allowed to stay at school. You can also share this information at parent-teacher conferences, Kindergarten Parent meetings or orientation for new students entering your School District. As school nurses, we are also public health practitioners and need to guard the public health by preventing and containing communicable diseases. Ensuring students are compliant with immunization requirements helps prevent communicable disease.

Some acute health conditions may require accommodations to help the student access the learning environment. This may require working with your Administrator or Special Education Director to develop a 504 Accommodation Plan. Examples of this are the child who has temporary hearing loss due to an ear infection or a child who has a broken arm or leg – these students may need different seating arrangements or assistance with note taking or carrying books and supplies. Most students with chronic health conditions will also need a 504 Accommodation Plan unless they qualify for Special Education (SPED) and have an Individual Education Plan (IEP).

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If a student’s acute injury results in the student not being able to participate in physical education (PE), a formal adaptive PE program may need to be put in place. This would allow the student to remain physically active while not causing further injury.

### **Engaging Parents in the Effort to Prevent Acute Illness and Injury**

When parents are engaged in their children’s lives, the children tend to be healthier, grow appropriately and have healthy self-esteem and mental health. As school nurses we can help parents be educated about:

- School nutrition environment and services
- School-based physical education and physical activity
- Managing chronic health conditions in school settings

Ways to engage with parents include:

- Connecting with parents – provide a school health tab on your School District’s website with up-to-date health information for families or provide a periodical health newsletter for students and parents.
- Engaging parents in school health activities such as providing health fairs at parent-teacher conferences or alerting them to upcoming health activities for families.
- Sustain parent engagement in school health by providing opportunities to volunteer to help with health fairs or complimenting their efforts to help keep their children and others healthy.

Resources for Engaging Parents in School Health:

- Parents for Healthy Schools (2015) CDC -  
<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/parentengagement/pdf/guide.pdf>

Parents for Healthy Schools; CDC: (2018)  
<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/parentengagement/parentsforhealthyschools.htm>