

**TOXIC MOLD
MENACE**
Keep your
**FAMILY
SAFE**

Autism FILE™

JUN-JUL 2015
ISSUE 62

Providing Hope and Help for Autism Families

Summertime Fun!
Autism-friendly activities
from Deirdre Imus

**Get Some
Z-Z-Zs**
Sleep Strategies
for the Whole
Family

**Give Autism
a Chance**

Breaking new ground
at the 2015 Summit
in Austin





© Aleks / Dollar Photo Club

HAVE A SAFE, SUN-KISSED SUMMER!

Enjoy autism-friendly fun in those lazy, hazy, crazy days ahead...

BY DEIRDRE IMUS

Despite longer days and a slower pace, summer goes by in a flash. We squeeze the most out of every drop of sunlight, each muggy night amidst the mosquitoes and crickets. And yet, the season can feel like it's over before it even begins. Weekends fill up with commitments; weekdays melt one into the next. We long to laze in summer's special spark, but then reality sets in. And by reality, I mean our kids.

No one loves summer more than children, with their boundless energy and disdain for homework. The burden to fill this extended time, however, falls on their caregivers: the parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, babysitters, and

▼

There's something magical about planting, nurturing, and enjoying vegetables or flowers grown by your own hand. This is true when you're 50 and also when you are five.

▲

anyone else charged with creating meaningful activities that will not only stimulate children's developing brains, but also kill a few hours.

For the sake of everybody's sanity, this time is best spent away from television and other technology that takes us out of the present moment. There are almost too many ways to entertain kids of any age in the great, green outdoors—and maybe even enjoy yourself a little bit in the process (I won't tell).

GROW A GARDEN—NO MATTER WHERE YOU LIVE

Parks are fantastic, and parks are ubiquitous, and we should all spend as much time as possible in these

▼ **GROWING TOGETHER**—Whether it's planting flowers, fruits, or vegetables, nothing compares to gardening with your child.



© SoIsImages / Dollar Photo Club

sprayed with these chemicals, but also in the air, water, and soil that has been consequently contaminated.

As I've noted before, eating foods treated with pesticides is especially risky for children. Studies have found that children whose mothers were exposed to pesticides during pregnancy might be at an increased risk for autism spectrum disorders. Pound for pound, kids eat more food, breathe more air, and drink more water than adults. Their developing bodies are still maturing, and according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), pesticides may block the absorption of important food nutrients necessary for normal, healthy growth. When you grow your own food in carefully sourced soil, you can rest (just a little bit) easier at night. Check out BeyondPesticides.org for the latest news on pesticides, and healthy alternatives.

prized places. But gardens are pretty fantastic too, and unlike a park, you can create one in your own backyard—or front yard, or on the side of your house, or in a window box. Studies have shown gardening can decrease stress, and it has also been found to promote physical activity in kids.

There's something magical about planting, nurturing, and enjoying vegetables or flowers grown by your own hand. This is true when you're 50 and also when you are five. Gardening is an excellent way to teach children the value of hard work, of patience, and of caring for something other than themselves. Plus, kids can see, smell, or eat the outcome of this labor, which is a nice dose of instant gratification.

As a bonus, gardening provides the opportunity for the entire family to consider more seriously just where their food comes from, and how it is grown. Growing your own organic produce helps you avoid eating genetically modified crops. Remember, the DNA of genetically modified foods is purposely altered, and it's not something I recommend introducing into your body. If you'd like to read more research on the perils of genetically engineered foods, I recommend the book *Altered Genes, Twisted Truth* by Steven M. Drucker.

AVOID PESTICIDE PERILS

Eating food from your own organic garden also protects your family from pesticide consumption. Pesticide use in conventional farming is rampant; its effects are long-lasting and wide-reaching. Our many chemical exposures—beginning in the womb—stay with us throughout our lives, according to the Pesticide Action Network North America. We encounter pesticides not only when we eat fruits and vegetables that have been

SUNSCREEN SAFETY

Whether in a garden or somewhere else, chances are you'll be spending more time outside this time of year, which means more interaction with pesky bugs and powerful sunshine. It is more important than ever to protect your entire family from the critters that want to bite, and the sun that wants to burn.

Finding a natural sunscreen free of harmful chemicals is no easy task; many of the substances that help keep the sun's harmful rays at bay are toxic in other ways. As the Environmental Working Group (EWG) notes in its excellent *Guide to Safer Sunscreens*, many of the most common sunscreens on the market contain chemicals like oxybenzone and avobenzone. While they are effective in blocking some of the sun's harmful rays, these ingredients also penetrate the skin and get into the bloodstream.

Studies have found that sunscreen chemicals may mimic hormones in the body, and oxybenzone in particular can cause allergic skin reactions, as well as an increased risk for endometriosis and lower birth weight in daughters, according to information provided on EWG's website. Mineral sunscreen, by comparison, is made using zinc oxide and/or titanium dioxide, usually in the form of nanoparticles, which don't penetrate the skin.

When selecting a sunscreen, EWG cautions against using sprays, which can be tempting given children's tendency to wiggle and inability to stand still for lotion application. However, aerosolized sprays pose serious inhalation risks, especially to people with existing respiratory conditions like asthma.

Another trap to avoid with sunscreen is buying one with a high sun protection factor (SPF). While the adage that more is better may apply when it comes to eating vegetables or

running miles, higher SPF may actually give people a false sense of security, causing them to spend more time in the sun. SPF refers only to protection from UVB rays, which cause burns, but it does little to guard against harmful UVA rays, which penetrate the skin and can cause skin cancer. What's more, a higher SPF product requires higher concentration of the risky sun-filtering chemicals I mentioned earlier. EWG suggests avoiding any sunscreens with SPF higher than 50; for more information on the healthiest lotions check out their website: <http://www.ewg.org/sunsafety>

Nearly five million people are treated for skin cancer in the U.S. each year, and rates of this deadly cancer are only increasing according to the Skin Cancer Foundation. It has never been more pertinent to practice sun safety, and while applying natural, non-toxic sunscreen is key, there are other ways to protect your family from



© Krzysztof Wiktor / Dollar Photo Club

the sun's harmful rays. The Skin Cancer Foundation suggests seeking shade, especially between 10am and 4pm; covering up with clothing, including a broad-brimmed hat; and wearing UV-blocking sunglasses. And don't forget to examine the whole family head-to-toe once a month for any suspicious skin changes.

BATTLING BUGS SAFELY

When it comes to that other summer peril—bug bites—long sleeves and long pants can go a long way towards protection, but are unfortunately not the most practical apparel for heat and humidity. Many people are prone to trust the harshest of chemicals when it comes to warding off mosquitoes and ticks, but these repellents can attract other health problems.

If avoiding DEET or other powerful chemicals is paramount for your family, there are botanical options for keeping bugs away. Some

ORGANIC PRODUCE: A BOUNTY OF HEALTH BENEFITS

Ideally, we'd all grow organic food in our gardens and live happily ever after. In reality, this commitment would become a full time job, something many of us already have. Which is why when you can't eat from your own garden, it's more important than ever to buy organic produce, preferably from a local farm. Research has found organic produce has more healthful properties than its non-organic counterpart, and supporting local farms means less fuel is needed to deliver the goods from the farm to your table.

Cutting down on, or eliminating, transport time is also another major reason to grow your own fruits and vegetables—not only because it will improve your carbon footprint, but because produce loses a bit of its luster in transit. The sooner you eat a tomato after it has been picked, for instance, the more nutritional benefits you'll derive from that sucker. Visiting your local farmer's market or participating in community supported agriculture (CSA) has never been more prudent, or more possible. For more information visit www.localharvest.org

But wait! There are more benefits to extol when it comes to gardening, which can be done any time of year,

really, but like many other outdoor pursuits is best in summer. Not only is the harvest more exciting, but in most parts of the country it's simply not that fun being outside in the cold weather. And if being outdoors feels good, that's because it is good for you: research published in 2010 found that being outside in nature makes people feel more alive, which in turn may make us more resilient to physical illness.

Part of the reason nature can be so energizing is because it promotes both physical activity and social interaction. Gardening may seem like a solitary undertaking, but planting and pruning and picking plants has never been more interactive. According to a 2014 report by the National Gardening Association, there was a 200 percent increase in community garden participation in the U.S. between

2008 and 2013. There are more than three million community gardens in this country—surely you can find one near you! Check out the website for the American Community Garden Association to find one near you: <https://communitygarden.org/find-a-garden>



© Mykola Veychko / Dollar Photo Club

of the more popular natural bug repellents contain castor oil, cedar oil, citronella oil, clove oil, geraniol oil, lemon-grass oil, peppermint oil, rosemary oil and soybean oil, per the EWG. Though most of these repel bugs for only a short time, this route guarantees you will avoid introducing chemicals into your environment. It's also important to do a body check for ticks after you and your children have been in the yard, or a park, or hiking in urban and rural areas.

HIT THE ROAD!

Many of us seize the opportunity to escape our environments altogether this time of year and travel far from home, which is challenging no matter how many kids you have, no matter where they fall (or don't) on the autism spectrum. Journeying by plane can be particularly stressful, but there

Wings for Autism, an initiative created by The Arc, is specially designed to alleviate some of the stress that ASD families experience when traveling by plane. The program allows them to practice entering the airport, obtaining boarding passes, going through security, and boarding the plane. Though it may not benefit all families with special needs kids, it can be especially helpful for many. Plus, Wings for Autism also provides an opportunity for airport, airline, and security personnel to observe and interact with these individuals and deliver optimal services to them.

As with anything, preparing ALL of your children ahead of time for some of the inevitable frustrations of air travel is advisable. Delays, long waits, and turbulence are maddening and frightening for even the most seasoned air traveler. Pack soothing, familiar toys, games, or snacks for an anxious



▲ **CLOSE-BY CAMPING**—Sometimes there's no place like home when it comes to summertime fun!

are ways to keep the pandemonium in check so that vacation isn't ruined before arriving at the destination.

You've probably heard stories or experienced firsthand the nightmare of flying with children. The process is nerve-racking for even the most well-traveled adult going solo; throw some kids into the equation, especially kids with autism, and all bets are off. Luckily, a growing number of airports around the country now allow individuals on the autism spectrum to "rehearse" for air travel.

child, and alerting flight attendants ahead of time to a child with special needs could be helpful, too. And maybe don't venture to the other side of the country or to Europe until all members of your brood are more accustomed to flying.

BACKYARD BENEFITS

If staying close to home—*really* close to home—is more your speed, look no further than your own backyard. Driving hours away to a remote destination to experience

the great outdoors is fun for a bunch of adults, but with kids, the wails of “Are we there yet?” may begin before you’ve even hit the highway. Camping out in your own backyard offers many of the same benefits, without the requisite chaos that almost everything with children entails. As a child, I have wonderful memories of making lemonade, arranging fresh cut flowers, and shucking corn all summer long.

Other ideas for backyard fun include a game of “drip, drip, splash” (think “duck, duck, goose,” but with a cup of water); cloud-gazing to get your kids’ imaginations going; kite-flying on windy days; or setting up an outdoor screen and hosting your very own outdoor movie night (it’s not as hard as you think). For more ideas, check out Babble’s list of backyard activities for kids: <http://www.babble.com/home/25-backyard-activities-for-kids>

© andreusk / Dollar Photo Club



As we get older, the memories forged during summer stick out a bit more in our minds, maybe because summer breaks up the monotony of a year bookended by school days. It is more precious in part because we treat it that way, and while it may not be feasible for all families to leave their comfort zone and travel far away, plenty of fun can be had just outside your door. ◀

AutismFILE™ covering content that matters, in every issue

Each edition of *Autism File* covers a diverse range of issues critical to ASD families:

- ▶ Nutrition
- ▶ Education
- ▶ Therapy, behavior & life skills
- ▶ Biomedical treatments and interventions
- ▶ Research
- ▶ Try It—Taste It—Worth Reading
- ▶ Day-to-day assistance and support

“I love *Autism File* and always recommend it to friends and fellow support group members. It truly is a springboard for recovery. I love that!”

Sylvia, Granite Bay, CA



Reach a highly targeted and receptive audience, who are deeply engaged with the content because it covers issues that uniquely matter to them.

Contact Kim Linderman, Advertising Director
klinderman@autismfile.com (309) 368-9186

Autism File, a bi-monthly publication, is now available as a **FREE digital download** when you click [here](#) to sign up!