Avoiding the summer slide
Van Sloun, along with others from across the organization, has been part of a growing movement to make prevention through healthy eating a priority. And it’s not just patients they’re trying to reach. A survey showed that many of Park Nicollet’s own team members are not eating right and not getting enough physical activity.

In response to the survey’s lackluster findings, Methodist Hospital food service took steps to encourage healthier eating for team members, patients and visitors by offering healthier meals in the hospital cafeteria, better options in hospital vending machines and suggestions for nutritious snacks at team member meetings and events.

Now, more than 100 Park Nicollet team members from across the organization – and even some patients – have joined forces to create the Better Eating Collaborative, a group dedicated to inspiring patients, team members and the community to embrace better eating.

“We’re working together to optimize the role of nutrition in achieving better health outcomes,” says Gina Houmann, program manager. “This extends from encouraging our own team members to live healthier lifestyles to the information and guidance your clinician provides at your annual well visit, and will soon be brought into the community through conferences and outreach to other local health care providers.”

Establishing a summer routine can help with that structure. “Even though your kids don’t have to be up early for school, make sure they follow a regular bed time and keep meal times as consistent as possible,” says Amy Mahowald, PT, a Park Nicollet Pediatric Rehabilitation supervisor.

Camps and summer programs are great for giving kids the structured activity they need, but if that’s not an option, try to plan a portion of each day with structured family activities like morning walks or spending afternoons at the park. Consider giving each child a chores list that has to be done by the end of the day to get a special privilege. This can help teach them to budget time during the day to get jobs done.

Limiting screen time is another key to avoiding the summer slide. “Computers and TV are easy and keep forces to create a healthier community – starting from within our own organization.

Park Nicollet experts share their tips for keeping your kids safe and healthy – while keeping you sane – through these long, hot summer days.

AT PARK NICOLLET, we’re dedicated to helping people live their healthiest, happiest lives. And that means not only treating illnesses, but working to prevent them from occurring in the first place.

And as our clinicians often see firsthand, some of the most common illnesses are caused by unhealthy lifestyles.

“Over the past two decades, dramatic changes in eating habits and the food environment, and a significant decrease in physical activity have led to increases in lifestyle-related disease including obesity, cancer, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, stroke and dental disease,” says Nancy Van Sloun, MD, a Park Nicollet Internal Medicine doctor. “These diseases are killing people, they’re reducing quality of life and they’re a financial burden on our nation’s health care system – and they’re preventable.”

While we all like to kick back and relax on vacation, it’s important for kids to keep a schedule and stay engaged during school breaks. “Summer break can be a challenging time for families, as the rhythm of your usual routine is often interrupted,” says Joshua Zimmerman, MD, chief of Behavioral Health at Park Nicollet. “Kids need structure, but coming up with ways to fill the day may be a difficult task for many families.”

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Illustration by Tuesday Bassen

Park Nicollet team members are joining forces to create a healthier community – starting from within our own organization.
kids occluded, but studies suggest too much screen time can contribute to problems with attention and behavior,” Zimmerman says. A good rule of thumb is to limit screen time to one hour per day.

In addition to creating a structured environment, keep an eye out for any developmental issues that may need a little extra attention during summer break. “Some of the most common reasons we see kids in the summer are related to struggles with small-motor skills like handwriting or parents having trouble understanding their child when they speak,” Mahonari says. “Large-motor concerns such as frequent tripping and falling or trouble riding a bike should also be mentioned to your child’s doctor. Many of these challenges can be helped with therapy.”

And finally, although it can sometimes feel like summer is all about the kids, it’s important for parents to take care of their mental health as well. Find other families who also have kids at home and see if you can exchange watching kids a few hours each week, so you can get some free time alone.

**Critter control: dealing with bites and stings**

Nothing can ruin a picnic faster than a swarm of angry bees. “It’s not possible to prevent our kids from being stung, but your best bet is to try keeping them out of any area where there might be bees,” says Ronnie Harstad, LPN, manager of Park Nicollet Allergy and Asthma. “Do not let them drink from open bottles or cans that have been sitting out.”

If they do get stung, immediately move them away from the area with bees, and try to remove the stinger with tweezers or scrape it out with a credit card. Wash the affected area and apply ice – don’t rub the area as that will spread the pain. Over-the-counter antihistamines can help with itching or swelling, and may prevent further symptoms.

Most cases are mild and medical care is not necessary. However, if your child develops hives or any breathing problems call 911 immediately.

Another concern in the upper Midwest is Lyme disease, which is transmitted by the tiny deer tick. Transmission of Lyme disease usually takes more than 48 hours because the bacteria lives in the tick’s intestines and takes time to make its way into the tick’s saliva.

The best prevention is wearing clothing to cover the skin, including long pants, high socks and hats. Parents should examine their child’s skin after being outdoors.

**Stand up to the sun**

We all know sun exposure causes skin cancer, and acne from suntan lotion in the shady sun, but have you considered the other effects of sun exposure? Sunscreen is our best tool to protect ourselves and our children. But if you think all sunscreen is equal, or wonder whether last year’s tube is still effective, read on for advice from Park Nicollet dermatologist, Larissa Speetzen, MD.

**Be choosy**

First, check the label for broad-spectrum protection. This protects against UVA rays, which cause aging, sun spots and wrinkles (and can pass through window glass), and UVB rays, which cause you to burn. Make sure the sun protection factor (SPF) is 30 or higher and the formula is water resistant.

Consider using a sunscreen that contains zinc oxide or titanium dioxide if you have very sensitive skin or when you are using sunscreen on your children.

The new spray sunscreens seem convenient, but there are some concerns about the safety effects of inhaling the sunscreen, and it’s difficult to tell how much is actually applied to the skin. If using a spray, make sure you rub the spray in to ensure an even coating.

**Cover up**

Don’t like sunscreen? Think about sun-protective clothing. Local company Coolibar makes light-weight, breathable clothes that physically protect your skin after being outdoors.

**Another option is Sun Guard, a laundry aid that adds sun protection to even coating.**

**Check the expiration date**

If you’re still hanging onto tubes from seasons past, you might be in luck. The FDA requires sunscreen to retain its original strength for three years. Check for an expiration date and if there’s no date, use a permanent marker to write the date of purchase. If a sunscreen has a funny smell or texture, throw it out.

**Fireworks**

Fireworks are fun, but it’s best to leave them to the pros. Even common fireworks such as sparklers can reach temperatures above 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit, easily causing severe and long-lasting burns injuries.

**Bikes**

Review the “rules of the road” with your children to make sure they know what side of the road to ride on, and the importance of obeying traffic signs. Buy a bike that fits your child, now, and don’t push your child to ride a two-wheeled bike without training wheels until he or she is ready. Start using a bike helmet when they learn to ride so it becomes a habit at an early age.

**Skateboarding and in-line skating**

Personal protection should include helmet, wrist guards, knee pads and elbow pads. It can be hard to enforce on a hot summer day, but the helmet should always be non-negotiable.

**Swimming**

Before hitting the pool or lake, always review water safety, including the importance of the “buddy system,” knowing the depth of water, and never diving into water with poor visibility or unknown depth.

**Lawn mowers**

Lawn mower injuries are quite common and are the No. 1 reason for amputation in young children. Children should be 12 years old to operate a push mower and 16 years old to operate a riding mower.

**Trampolines**

Thousands of injuries are caused each year by trampolines, and the American Academy of Pediatrics strongly discourages home use of trampolines. Providing supervision and proper spotting during trampoline use is best. It’s best to allow only one person at a time on the trampoline. Trampolines are not recommended for children younger than 6 years old.

**Playground equipment**

Especially with younger children, who are new to the equipment, review rules about not jumping off swings, standing on swings or jumping from high places, as well as sliding safety (one person at a time, no climbing up the slide).

**ATVs**

Children are involved in about 30 percent of all ATV-related deaths and emergency room-treated injuries. Children who are too young to have a driver’s license should not be allowed to operate off-road vehicles.