

# Does your child need glasses?

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## A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOR PARENTS EVERYWHERE

How well your child can see may affect how well your child performs in school and influence your child's well-being through adult life. The earlier a vision problem is detected, the more likely it can be corrected or even prevented. Uncorrected problems can impair the child's physical, intellectual, and social development and even lead to permanent blindness.

During the first eight years of life, "the brain and the eye are learning to work together and the visual system is still developing," according to Dr. Christina Weng, assistant professor of ophthalmology at the Baylor College of Medicine. Parents need to watch for changes in behavior that may indicate potential eye problems. Signs may include:

- frequent headaches
- excessive eye rubbing
- holding a book extremely close or far away
- closing one eye to see better
- crossing, wandering, or squinting of the eyes

- inability to focus
- acting out

If a child shows any signs of vision loss, it's best to visit an eye doctor right away. It's also a good idea to see an eye doctor regularly to detect conditions such as glaucoma, which shows no signs in the early stages.

Vision is so important that a number of states require vision screening in the preschool years. In Texas, for example, the State requires that all children enrolled for the first time in any public, private, parochial, or denominational school or in a regulated child care facility must be screened for vision (and hearing) problems. ■



# Protect children from opioid death

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## A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOR PARENTS EVERYWHERE

You come home from the hospital after having shoulder surgery, and the pain is so intense that you ask your spouse for an oxycodone pill you just picked up from the pharmacy. After taking it with water, you lie down and close your eyes to let the drug work. Meanwhile, your 2-year-old finds the pill bottle, which was not closed properly, and picks up a pill, thinking it's candy.

The stage is set for the child to eat the pill and die.

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### NEVER GIVE YOUR MEDICATION TO OTHERS.

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Easy access to prescribed and illegal opioids is claiming a growing number of accidental child deaths. They represent a fraction of the deaths taking place—90 overdose deaths a day—in the nation's opioid epidemic.

### What are opioids?

Opioids are a class of drugs typically used to relieve pain. They include pain killers legally available by prescription, such as oxycodone (OxyContin), hydrocodone (Vicodin), codeine, morphine, and fentanyl, among others as well as the illegal drug heroin.

In the late 1990s drug companies encouraged opioids as a safe and effective pain reliever, and doctors began prescribing them more often and for longer periods. Unfortunately, misuse and addiction followed, leading to a public health crisis.

Opioids taken during pregnancy can result in drug withdrawal effects in newborns (called neonatal abstinence syndrome), requiring long and costly

hospital stays. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, a baby is born with the syndrome every 25 minutes.

### Preventing misuse and overdose

As a parent or patient, you can use prescription medications properly, specifically:

- Follow the label directions or instructions from the pharmacist
- Be aware of potential interactions with other drugs as well as alcohol.
- Never stop or change a dosing regimen without first discussing it with your doctor.
- Never use another person's prescription, and never give your medication to others.
- Store drugs safely, locked out of the reach of children.
- Discard unused or expired meds properly and promptly.

### Leftover prescription pills?

You can dispose of prescription drugs safely through a take-back program of the Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Department of Justice. The agency has set up collection sites at various community locations, including pharmacies, hospitals and clinics, and law enforcement agencies.

To find a location near you, go to [www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drug\\_disposal/takeback/](http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drug_disposal/takeback/). ■

# Save that holiday trash!

## A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOR PARENTS EVERYWHERE

**W**ait! Before you throw out the cardboard boxes, gift wrap, packing peanuts, holiday cards, and other materials that accumulate over the holidays, consider repurposing them for learning activities for your children when it's too cold to go outside.

**Cardboard boxes.** As you have probably already discovered, children enjoy playing with boxes. A large cardboard box can become a car, boat, or train for pretend play, and small boxes can be stacked to make a house for small people figures. This activity encourages creativity and imagination.

**Packing peanuts tub.** Dump packing peanuts into a tub, box, or baking pan. Encourage children to explore the material. Provide plastic cups, spoons, and tongs. Invite children to scoop the peanuts and dump them into containers. For variety, add cut-up drinking straws, plastic bottle caps, acorns, pebbles, large buttons or beads, metal bolts and washers, or small plastic toy figures. Caution: Toddlers put everything in their mouths, so provide constant

supervision to avoid choking. This activity enhances sensory perception and small muscle skills.

**Holiday sewing card.** Cut out the bell, tree, sleigh, or other image from the front of a card. Use a hole punch to punch holes around the edges of the image. Thread a large needle with yarn or ribbon, and knot the end. Show children how to poke the needle in one hole and pull it out another hole. This activity enhances eye-hand coordination and strengthens small muscles in the hands.

**Gift wrap garland.** Cut 1-inch-wide strips from leftover or used gift wrap. Cut the strips into 4- or 5-inch lengths. Glue the ends of one strip together to make a loop. Show children how to slip another strip through the loop and glue the ends together. Repeat with remaining strips. Hang the garland in a window or from cabinet knobs. This activity strengthens small muscle skills and eye-hand coordination. You can make this a pre-math and pre-reading activity by having children sequence the loops in a pattern (red, blue, green, red, blue, green, for example).

**Gift wrap rolls.** Invite children to use empty rolls, either whole or in shorter lengths, to build a bridge, cabin, or castle. Provide glue and tape to hold pieces together, markers to draw architectural features, cardboard for the roof, and paper scraps for shingles or flags. This activity encourages creativity and problem solving.

Ideally, in all the activities above, you will provide the materials and allow children to play with the materials as they choose. Providing a model that you have made and giving step-by-step instructions can stifle creativity and initiative. ■

CREATIVE COMMONS: EMMA CRAIG



# Is faster always better?

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A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOR PARENTS EVERYWHERE

Have you exchanged eating together as a family for rushing children to soccer practice? Does your hectic lifestyle leave you so tired that you fall asleep watching TV instead of reading a bedtime story to your children? Do you connect with extended family only through Facebook?

If so, maybe it's time to consider slowing down.

Many people across the country are slowing down to reclaim their lives and enjoy life more fully. The movement started in the mid-1980s as an alternative to fast food. It emphasizes connecting with family and friends at table, preserving regional cuisine, and promoting local, sustainable farming.

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## CONSIDER SLOWING DOWN.

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Today it has broadened to include slow living—walking in the park, picnicking in the backyard, doing yoga, reading a book in a comfy armchair, drifting across a pond in a canoe, writing in a journal, and engaging in other quiet, peaceful activities.

“Oh, but I don't have time,” you may say. But as someone once said, “It's not about *having* time. If it matters, you will *make* time.”

For more information about the Slow Food movement, see [www.slowfoodusa.org/about-us](http://www.slowfoodusa.org/about-us). ■