

Traveling with Children

The Value of Family  
Mealtime

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*"There is no ideal Christmas; only the one Christmas you decide to make as a reflection of your values, desires, affections, and traditions."*  
-Bill McKibben

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Merry Everything Happy Always

## Traveling with Children: Tips for Safety and Sanity

The holidays are peak travel times as schools close and families converge to spend time together. For some it's a quick drive 'over the river' to Grandma's house, while for others it's a plane ride cross-country to hit the slopes. How many times can you hear "Are we there yet?" before you want to scream? Even a short trip can be stressful when traveling with small children. We've compiled some strategies to keep your kids distracted, happy and secure and to limit your stress during holiday travel.

- The key to traveling with kids of any age is to plan ahead. When you pack, try to anticipate problems that might occur and include simple solutions. Make a list (and check it twice), including items needed for feeding, sleep, bath-time, travel and weather appropriate clothing.
- Arrive at the airport early since even small tasks take extra time with little ones in tow. Don't add to your stress by having to run to the gate.
- Check as many items as you can to allow your hands to be free. Use a front carrier/sling for an infant while walking through the airport.
- Make sure you tell your children to stay where they are if you get split up, so you can look for them more easily; designate an easy-to-find meeting place.
- Keep your carry-on as light as possible, but remember the necessities: a large supply of diapers/wipes, extra clothes for you and baby, formula/breast milk, snacks and lots of activities. If your child is sick or has special dietary or medical needs, make sure medications are in your carry-on and accessible in case of an emergency.

Medicine and formula are not subject to volume restrictions on flights but do need to be declared at security.

- Allow as much time as possible for active play to get their energy out before boarding the plane or starting a long drive.
- If possible, have one parent board and get the seat settled during family boarding, then get on the plane last with the kids. This can cut 20-30 minutes of time they are confined to their seats.
- During take-off provide something to suck to help them clear their ears (bottle, pacifier or nursing, or gum for older kids).
- The beginning of the flight or drive may be fun for them to look around, then slowly pull out toys one at a time. Carry a surprise gift that they don't know about in case all else fails and you need to head off a meltdown.
- Ignore your normal TV time limitations-movies and shows are a great distraction during travel.
- Despite your best efforts, there will be times your child will cry or act-up on your trip. Ignore dirty looks and people who are rude. Only you can know the right way to handle your children.

Above all, stay relaxed. Your stress and anxiety may make your child more stressed and agitated. Even if you're overwhelmed, put on a big smile and hope it rubs off on everyone around you!

## "We love our bread, we love our butter, but most of all we love each other."

As the holidays roll around we anticipate spending time with loved ones. Holiday dinners are often a traditional way to spend time with family this time of year. Things slow down with kids out of school, and more time means the chance to prepare home cooked meals and spend lengthy amounts of time around the dinner table. Then, the season is over and before you know it the family dinners have become a bit of an inconvenience. The kids want mac n' cheese, dad wants a burger, and mom wants chicken, so the family kitchen has now become a fast food restaurant where you get what you want, and you get it fast as not to interrupt more "important" things. In an article in TIME magazine, meal times and the important role they play in family dynamics is discussed, and the value of this "pastime" is highlighted.

In recent decades, where our children are overscheduled and over-indulged, family dinners have been put on the backburner. Sometimes due to lack of time, or other times due to lack of commitment to an important family ritual, we put more value in pleasing our children and keeping them busy than bringing the family together at the table once a day. The value of family dinners is priceless. The dinner table provides a safe and non-judgmental environment where children are able to create family values, ideals, and traditions. It also provides an opportunity for family members to transmit wisdom, embed expectations, conspire, forgive, and repair.

Additionally, adolescents who sit down with the family for dinner 3 or more times a week are less likely to partake in risky behaviors such as smoking, drinking, and drugs, and are more apt to perform well in school,

delay sex, and adopt healthy eating habits and table manners. For small children, dinner time is a learning ground for picking up vocabulary, problem solving, and learning respect for others.

However, the less often a family eats together, the worse the experience is when meal times do occur. There is usually less conversation and less healthy food. There may even be tension. And although parents often think that children want less to do with family as they grow older, this does not seem to be the case. Children who have family meals 3 or fewer times a week wish they did so more often, and are less likely to feel that their parents are proud of them.

If regular, structured meal times are not a part of your family's weekly schedule, consider making a few small changes. Have all family members remain seated until everyone is finished. Add one mandatory family meal a month until it becomes routine to have at least 3 family meals a week. Provide topics to facilitate healthy conversation. And of course prepare healthy, yummy food that appeals to all family members, while introducing new and exciting foods at the same time.

For the complete article in TIME magazine, please visit: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1200760,00.html>

## FAMILY: NATURE VS. NURTURE

A wise person once said, "You take the good, you take the bad, you take them both and there you have the Facts of Life." (Was that Mrs. Garrett or Blair who said/sang that?) That sitcom wisdom is actually a fairly accurate explanation of genetics. The theme of this month's newsletter is "Family", and we thought it might be helpful to look at the scientific side of being a family, i.e. genetics, and how it potentially relates to your child's health.

Like it or not, our "family history" greatly affects our health. I sometimes feel bad asking these questions at an initial newborn visit. Both parents are there, looking at this precious, little gift that has come to their family, and it seems that they feel guilty in answering, feeling that they have perhaps cursed their precious little one with the medical conditions from "my side of the family". Sometimes the parent will even answer my family history questions and then apologize to the baby ("Sorry about that, buddy; if you end up with asthma, I know it's my fault"). But how traits are passed from parents to kids is really complicated; in fact, much of it is still a mystery.

Having an understanding of genetics begins with understanding the differences and relationships between 3 key terms: **DNA, genes, and chromosomes**. All of an individual's genetic information is contained in his/her DNA, and every cell in one's body (and there are approximately 10 trillion cells in your body!) contains the entire DNA code. If unraveled, the DNA in just one of your cells would stretch 6-9 feet long, but it can fit inside the nucleus of a cell because it is coiled and packaged into chromosomes (in fact, if you took all of the DNA in your body and stretched it end-to-end, it would go to the sun and back 600 times!). A gene is simply a small segment of DNA that codes for a specific protein. One way to think of these terms is to imagine that in your kitchen you had 46 cookbooks, 23 of the books handed down from your mom, explaining how she liked to make meat loaf, sweet potato casserole, blueberry pie, etc., and the other 23 books coming from your father's family, how THEY liked to make meat loaf, sweet potato casserole, blueberry pie, and other things. All of the letters of the pages of every book put together would be your DNA. The individual recipes in the books are like genes, i.e. groups of the DNA arranged together to code for a specific product. And each cookbook is like a chromosome, arranging and containing a specific portion of the DNA. Each person receives 23 chromosomes from their mother and

23 chromosomes from their father.

The genetic transmission of some traits and diseases is relatively straightforward and predictable (remember the Austrian monk Gregor Mendel with his pea plants and Punnett squares?). However, most of genetics is NOT this way. Sometimes genes are expressed; sometimes they aren't. Sometimes bad genes are inherited from parents; sometimes these "mutations" happen spontaneously. We all carry some faulty genes, yet we don't fully understand what causes them to be expressed in some individuals and not in others. How does aging cause more genetic propensities to emerge? Why are some diseases more likely if the gene was passed from the mother while others are just the opposite? Autism definitely has genetic factors, but what other environmental factors affect its occurrence. Similar questions exist for asthma, diabetes, alcoholism, ADHD, mental illness, and on and on. Clearly, one's DNA does not tell the whole story.

We are living in a time of exploding knowledge regarding genetics, and with this increased knowledge have come some difficult and practical questions for patients, families, and health care providers. One can imagine a day in the very near future when genetic testing, including knowing one's entire genetic makeup consisting of approximately 25,000 genes, could be readily available to parents at the birth of their child. In some ways this seems like a remarkable advance for health and medicine. But questions remain –

- How accurate will this testing be?
- Once a gene is identified in your child, how accurately can their risk of developing the disease be predicted?
- Ethical/legal considerations such as, once obtained, who should have access to this information?

Human genetics has become one of the most exciting stories of medicine, and the majority is yet to be written. While there are some aspects of family and genetics that we wish we could protect our children from, we hope you enjoy this season of celebrating the family you have and the gifts to our kids that we can control – lots of love and great holiday memories.

-Dr. Middleton

**Blessings and peace from Middleton Pediatrics**

## Middleton Pediatrics' Favorite Holiday Traditions

Do you have a favorite family tradition around the holidays? Here are some of the favorite holiday traditions among the Middleton Pediatrics family:

**Dr. Middleton**-Fondue on Christmas Eve.

**Ginger**-We have an ornament exchange on Christmas Eve.

**Lisa**-Brunch and playing board games on Christmas.

**Kelli**-We attend an annual Christmas Eve party with our best family friends.

**Ebony**-Everyone makes a unique pillow and we have a pillow exchange on Christmas Eve.

**Christine**-Pajama party the night before Christmas, and cinnamon rolls for breakfast.

**Liz**- After unwrapping gifts on Christmas morning we watch classic holiday movies in our pajamas.

**Michelle**-We start Christmas morning by singing Happy Birthday to Jesus.

**Holidays in Orlando**  
Orlando offers a variety of family-friendly activities throughout the holiday season. If you're looking for ways to spend time with the kids during their break from school, check out some of the activities in your community.

**Holidays at the Waterhouse**  
Lake Lily-Maitland  
Through January 15th  
\$3 adult, \$2 kids

**Holiday Gingerbread House Contest and Exhibit**  
Festival Bay Mall-Orlando  
Through January 1st  
FREE

**ICE!**  
Gaylord Palms-Orlando  
Through January 2nd  
\$10-\$30

**Hanukkah in the Park**  
Central Park-Winter Park  
December 25th 5PM  
FREE

**Now Snowing**  
Celebration Town Center  
Through December 31st Daily 6-9PM  
FREE

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