

The Stress-Free Way
to Straight A's

The Importance of
Summer Reading

Diastole: A Lesson
from the Heart

Team Spotlight

May 2011

Stress-Free Summers

Middleton Pediatrics Summer Reading List

Childhood Favorites

- **Dr. Middleton:** *The Chronicles of Narnia*, C.S. Lewis
- **Liz Moore:** *The Nancy Drew Series*, Carolyn Keene
- **Kelli Coon:** *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, Shel Silverstein
- **Ebony Ingram:** *Green Eggs and Ham*, Dr. Seuss
- **Ginger Hunt:** *Swiss Family Robinson*, Johann David Wyss
- **Lisa Aldrich:** Judy Bloom books
- **Christine May:** *Amelia Bedelia*, Peggy Parish

*Reading is to the
mind what exercise
is to the body.*

~Sir Richard Steele

The Stress-Free Way to Straight A's

Final exams can make students feel overwhelmed, stressed out, and uneasy. For high school age kids, exams may contribute to a lack of sleep due to anxiety or pulling all-nighters. Feeling the pressure at the end of the year may be the result of a lack in self-confidence, negative thinking, perfectionism, and competition; all of which can interfere with a child's ability to perform well on tests. As a student sits down to take an exam, the stress that has built up in anticipation can prevent him or her from thinking clearly and recalling information that was learned through hours of class time and studying. Students can prepare themselves well for exams by studying two or more weeks in advance, getting at least eight hours of quality sleep the night before a test, and eating a healthy breakfast balance with protein and carbohydrates to jumpstart their energy level for the day. However, if your child tends to feel nervous or anxious moments before an exam, there are a few simple techniques that can help them relax enough to be a successful test taker.

- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** contracting muscles as you inhale and relaxing them as you exhale. Begin with contracting your toes in your right foot and work your way up through your feet, legs, abdomen, shoulders, arms, hands, and fingertips, concentrating on one muscle group at a time and alternating right and left. Contract each muscle group for 10-30 seconds before releasing and moving onto the next muscle group.

- **Deep Breathing Technique:** deep breathing from the abdomen, which allows you to inhale more oxygen, thus reducing feelings of anxiety. Sitting up straight in a chair, place one hand on your chest and one on your stomach. Inhale through your nose and feel your chest rise; exhale through your nose and feel your chest fall. Continue for another 5-10 breaths—each time concentrating on making your breath go a little bit deeper, so your chest rises then your stomach rises as you inhale. As you exhale, let your stomach slowly fall followed by your chest. In yoga, this is called a ujjayi breath, which literally means "the ocean breath." Yoga is another great way to relieve stress year-round.
- **Visualization:** mentally imagining yourself in a relaxed, stress free environment by focusing on the senses of the body. Sitting down with your eyes closed and feet uncrossed, take a cleansing breath in and out. Imagine yourself in a peaceful setting such as the beach. Concentrate on the feelings you experience in this setting; the way the sand feels between your toes, the sight of a sunset on the horizon, the taste of the salty air, the noise of the crashing waves, and the smell of the clean breeze.

The Importance of Summer Reading

What comes to mind when you think about the end of the school year? Spending the summer with your children? Swimming? Catching up on sleep? Typically, the furthest thing from your mind (and your child's) is staying prepared for next school year and tackling summer reading lists. But, teachers and literacy experts agree that children of all ages need to read to or to read by themselves over the summer. When you read or talk to young children about books, they develop important language skills and knowledge about how stories are constructed that will help them to become stronger readers and writers. School-aged children's summer reading and book discussions will help them maintain reading skills, improve reading fluency, and learn new vocabulary and concepts. Older students may have required reading to complete for upcoming courses, but should also be encouraged to read books of their choice for enjoyment.

There are many ways to weave language and literacy activities into your child's summer days and for helping your older children tackle their school summer reading lists. A great place to begin is to track down required and recommended books from your child's school. (Most school websites have links to their summer reading lists). The earlier in the summer that you begin this process, the more likely you and your child will avoid the back to school rush of trying to finish these books in August. For younger children, the

Orange County Public Library offers programs aimed at making story telling fun, and interactive. (<http://www.ocpls.info/Programs/storyPrograms.asp>) This is also a great place to find new books to read and borrow, as well as a great break from those all-too-hot summer days. On-line websites and programs aim to keep your family interested in reading throughout the summer with book clubs, suggested activities and book recommendations. Visit these sites for more ideas:

<http://www.scholastic.com/summer>
<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/summerreading/index.asp>
<http://readingprograms.org>

When parents and children enjoy reading together, children develop a love of books and reading that lasts a lifetime. Try to incorporate a time each day or week that everyone in your family sets aside to read, since modeling this good behavior is the best way to ensure reading becomes an enjoyable pastime for your child.

DIASTOLE: A LESSON FROM THE HEART

As the school year is coming to a close, one of the hot topics of conversation among parents is what each other's children will be doing during the summer months. As we think about the summer schedule, we as parents would do well to take some instruction from the heart—literally, the blood-pumping organ in our chest.

A Quick Overview of Heart Physiology— SYSTOLE and DIASTOLE

The Heart has two main phases of functioning:

- Systole—the time when it is contracting/pumping; and
- Diastole—the time between contractions when it is filling up

Some think of systole as the time where the heart is doing work and a diastole as the time it is resting, but this is really not accurate. In fact, both phases are essential parts of the “work” and are intricately related and dependent on one another.

For instance, there are conditions where the heart rate is too fast (pumping too many times a minute), and therefore too much of the cardiac cycle is spent in systole. The result is that diastole is compromised, thus impairing the heart's ability to be adequately filled with blood. This obviously limits the heart's ability to pump effectively. So, without adequate diastole, systole is not what it should be. The heart may be quite “active”, but it's functioning is less productive and the whole body suffers.

Why our kids need rest

What does this have to do with our kids' summer? Figuratively speaking, our kids spend a lot of time in systole. Their schedules during the school year are filled with so many things—most of it really “good” things—there is not a lot of down time. Over the last 25 years, it is estimated that our children have approximately 12 fewer hours of down time each week. We so badly want our children to “have the best” and “be the best”, and we think that if they are more active then life is more full. The reality is that over-scheduling our kids can have many ill effects such as fatigue, headaches, less sleep, more anxiety, and less creativity to name a few. Unscheduled time is when our minds are restored. Truth is that most of us as adults don't do a good job of diastole either.

Closing

All too often, as we look ahead at the summer and see an open schedule, our tendency is to want to fill it. Instead of trying to fill your kids' schedule, schedule some time for your kids to be filled. Play board games as a family once a week. Eat long family meals at your house, letting each family member have a turn at planning and preparing the menu. Take evening walks. Protect a specific time each week (e.g. Sunday afternoons) and don't allow anything to be scheduled during that time.

Let summer be a time of some diastole—it is good for the heart and for our kids!

“Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass under trees on a summer's day, listening to the murmur of the water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is by no means a waste of time.”

~J. Lubbock

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Team Spotlight: Liz Moore



Hometown: Toledo, OH
Favorite Restaurant: Inky's Italian in Toledo, OH

Education: University of Toledo, Human Resources Management
Favorite Movie: Just Married
Favorite Food: Sushi
Favorite Holiday: Christmas

Favorite Vacation Memory: Kawai 2011
Why she loves working at Middleton Pediatrics: “Wonderful families and an exceptional team!”

Favorite City: Washington, DC