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### Healthy Families = Healthy Communities: Let's All Be Aware!

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# Healthy Families = Healthy Communities: Let's All Be Aware!

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Office of University Communications

September 6, 2013

*By: Dr. Shonna Snyder, Certified Health Education Specialist*

Families truly have the ability to impact the health of children, grandchildren, spouses, extended family, and even the community in which they live. The research sends a loud and clear message that when the family is actively participating in each other's lives in a healthy way, the health of the individuals in the family improves. When parents talk to their children about drugs and alcohol, the children are less likely to participate in those behaviors. When families decide to eat nutritious meals together, health problems can be reduced and obesity can be controlled. When parents choose to get their children vaccinated, they not only protect the child from many deadly illness, they also protect the other children in their community from those same deadly illnesses.

National awareness months surrounding family health issues are great ways to learn more about health issues and become more involved in your family and community. August was Children's Eye Health and Safety Month. Although sports related injuries are the most frequent injuries to children's eyes (baseball, basketball, and racquet sports most frequently), there are other injuries to look out for as well. The sun is also a culprit of injury to one's eyes, so it is important that everyone, including children, wear sunglasses that have a UVA/B protection. Some additional tips that families can be reminded of to protect their eyes are:

- Participate in yearly eye exams;
- Be aware of the warning signs of eye injuries or problems (frequent eye rubbing, squinting, and headaches are just a few);
- Wear eye protection during sports participation; and
- Treat eye injuries quickly and effectively.

August was also National Immunization Awareness Month. It is important that families, especially children, receive their required vaccinations in order to not only keep themselves healthy but the children and community around them as well. In recent years there has been debate over vaccines. While I will not engage in that debate here, what I know about vaccines is this: I do not walk down the street any longer and see a child with small pox, a very noticeable disease in which painful "pox" or blisters cover the whole body and produce devastating scars. I do not see young children (or young adults for that matter) wearing prosthetic shoes as a result of polio, a crippling virus. Sometimes we must use common sense when making decisions to keep our children and communities healthy, and I feel that

vaccinations are common sense. If you or your child need vaccinations see your health care provider or visit your local health department- THIS MONTH. After all, it is National Immunization Awareness Month.

September is National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month. One in every three children in the U.S. is overweight or obese. This excess body weight is causing health problems that were once only seen in adults. Children are now being diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure. These diagnoses lead to premature death. So this is an important month for families. Families can combat the obesity crisis by focusing on healthy nutrition and increasing physical activity. While shows like *The Biggest Loser* are a Hollywood hit, the premise of the show is one that families can and should relate to—monitoring food and fitness can change your life. Some tips that families can incorporate are:

- Drink water. Eliminate sodas and sugary drinks, including our favorite southern drink, sweet tea;
- Increase your fresh fruits and vegetables. Eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables that are every color of the rainbow each day;
- Reduce the amount of processed (packaged) food you eat. Eliminate things like boxed, frozen meals (for example, pizza rolls) and substitute healthy snacks like carrots;
- Reduce the amount of fast food you eat. The more you cook at home, the more nutritious your food will be; and
- Commit to one hour of physical activity a day. This simply means *move!* Walk the dog for 20 minutes, rake the leaves for 20 minutes, play at recess for 20 minutes and there you have it. It doesn't take a gym membership and a personal trainer to accomplish this.

Family Health and Fitness Day is September 28. I encourage you and your family to get involved in your local community events and improve your health. And remember, when you improve your health, you help to improve your family's health too.

*Dr. Shonna Snyder is an associate professor of health and wellness at Gardner-Webb University. She holds an undergraduate degree from Wilmington College (Wilmington, Ohio), a Master of Education from the University of Cincinnati (Cincinnati, Ohio) and a Doctor of Education from Purdue University (West Lafayette, Ind.).*