

# OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Dr. Joseph Baker

## What Parents Need to Know About Outdoor Recreational Gear

*Summer fun used to involve little more than a ball, a bat and a sprinkler. Today, summer means everything from trampolines to skateboards, scooters and ATVs. All this gear might make summer more fun, but Dr. Baker warns that it also makes it more dangerous. This summer make sure you know how to keep your children safe with all outdoor fun.*



The good news? Parents can help protect their children — and themselves — by learning about the dangers associated with outdoor recreational gear. And reading this month's *Optimal Health University*® handout is a great place to start.

Dr. Baker believes that education is an integral part of the prevention equation because it enables patients to take a more active role in their health care. Preventing injury, illness and disease is the foundation of the *chiropractic lifestyle*.

### Is it Time to Toss the Trampoline?

Outdoor trampolines continue to pop up in backyards across the country and around the globe: despite the fact that these dangerous playthings cause thousands of accidents each year.

Virtually every television program featuring “funny” home videos runs at least one clip of a child or adult careening off the edge of a trampoline, falling through the mat's sun-rotted material or using the equipment in ways the manufacturer never intended:

such as expecting the mat's resilient surface to break the fall of a young daredevil's rooftop swan dive.

Dr. Baker is alarmed by the number of trampoline-related injuries, particularly since the majority of them are preventable. A whopping 6,500 pediatric neck injuries occurred in 1998 alone: a five-fold jump from the previous 10 years. According to researchers from the Children's Medical Center at the Medical College of Georgia, Augusta, Ga., injuries ranged from minor to paraplegia and quadriplegia. Death was also reported (*Pediatr Neurosurg* 2000;32:170-5).

The spine of the neck, also referred to as the cervical spine, is a delicate arrangement of vertebrae (bones) that protect the spinal cord: the latter of which, along with the brain, comprises the central nervous system (CNS). Woven in, around and through these vertebrae are numerous nerve fibers and blood vessels.

Dr. Baker cannot overemphasize how vitally important it is to protect the spine and maintain its structural integrity through regularly scheduled chiropractic care. Why? Because misaligned vertebrae spark a common condition known as *vertebral subluxation*.

Migraine headaches, earaches and low-back pain are just three of the many health problems associated with vertebral subluxations. Dr. Baker re-

aligns spinal vertebrae — and corrects vertebral subluxations — with safe, gentle maneuvers known as *chiropractic adjustments*.

Use of a trampoline is directly linked to injuries of the CNS (and spine), according to researchers in Canada (*Sports Med* 2005;35:685-715).

Among 80 children with trampoline-related injuries, researchers from the University of Manitoba, Canada, reported that 52 were injured while on the mat and 24 when ejected from its surface. A total of 60 children sustained a fracture or fracture-dislocation, with 48 orthopedic injuries occurring in the upper extremities (*Can J Surg* 2003;46:199-201).

Although experts recommend banning children of all ages from using trampolines, the popularity of these dangerous backyard additions continues to soar.

### Rethink Rollerblades and Skateboards

What age group incurs the highest number of rollerblade and skateboard injuries? According to an Australian study, 10- to 14-year-olds. The most common injuries are fractures of the forearm and wrist (*J Paediatr Child Health* 1996;32:35-8).



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In the United States alone, skateboard-related injuries account for an estimated 50,000 emergency department visits and 1,500 hospitalizations among children and adolescents each year (*Pediatrics* 2002;109:542-3).

The authors of the Australian study and the American Academy of Pediatrics suggest the following skateboard and rollerblade safety tips:

- Avoid riding in traffic.
- Wear protective gear (helmets, along with wrist, elbow and knee guards).
- Ensure adult supervision is available for children under the age of 10.
- Teach children basic operational and safety techniques in a controlled setting.

### **Beware of Bicycles**

There's no question that failing to wear a bicycle helmet bolsters the likelihood of head and face injuries. But falls aren't the only danger associated with bike riding.

In a review of 90 pediatric cases of foot injury, 80 children were injured when their feet became entangled in bicycle spokes. Injuries were related to both the front and back wheel. The researchers attributed the mechanism of injury to lack of footrests and unguarded spokes (*J Coll Physicians Surg Pak* 2005;15:802-4).

To prevent these injuries, ensure that shoelaces aren't undone or flopping over the foot and secure baggy cuffs.

### **Know Your Nonmotorized Scooter**

When researchers surveyed a group of 3,087 second- through sixth-grade students, they discovered that 93.2 percent had ridden a nonmotorized scooter, and 71.4 percent currently owned one. While there were no injury statistics listed for the children who merely rode scooters, youngsters who owned the wheeled devices had an accident rate of 32 percent: despite the fact that half of them were wearing helmets (*Pediatr Emerg Care* 2005;21:650-2).

Does this mean that protective helmets don't help? Absolutely not! What it means is that protective gear *alone* isn't always enough to ensure a child's safety — whether on a bicycle or a scooter. "Physicians should continue to educate [their pediatric] patients and their parents as to potential injuries on scooters," the researchers concluded, "and encourage the use of safety gear, especially helmets, when riding scooters."

Speaking of safety, it's important to note that a staggering number of scooters have been recalled during the last decade. Six years ago, Excite Ltd. of Hong Kong recalled approximately 80,000 scooters.

That same year, Kent International Inc. of Parsippany, N.J., and Kash 'N Gold Ltd. of Ronkonkoma, N.Y., recalled another 97,500 scooters.

### **Monitor Motorized Scooters**

The US Product Safety Commission (CPSC) reported 2,870 emergency-room treated injuries related to motorized scooters in the first nine months of 2001: a dramatic jump from the 1,330 injuries recorded in all of 1999.

Of these injuries, 39 percent involved children under the age of 15. That's why the CPSC recommends that youngsters be at least 12 years old before allowing them to ride a motorized scooter: and then, only in a supervised capacity.

### **Avoid All-Terrain Vehicle Accidents**

After reviewing a decade of statistics, Canadian researchers have concluded that the most frequent ATV-related injuries include deep, soft-tissue trauma and fractures/dislocations. In a peer-reviewed medical article published earlier this year, they noted that the injuries "more closely resemble those from motorized vehicles and are more significant than bicycling [injuries]." (*Inj Prev* 2006;12:30-4.)

While it's no secret that ATVs are dangerous, it may surprise you to learn that outdoor clotheslines and wire fences pose a particularly unusual

ATV-related hazard. In reviewing seven such cases — each involving children between the ages of 2 and 14 — researchers noted that all had significant neck and/or facial lacerations. Worse yet, five of the seven were taken to the operating room for wound closure. "One patient had functional impairment and all had lasting disfigurement." (*Pediatr Emerg Care* 2006;22:45-7.)



"ATVs are as dangerous as motorcycles" researchers noted, adding that the number of closed-head injuries were higher in the ATV group than they were in the motorcycle group: a fact they attributed to the absence of helmets. They also noted that children and women were more apt to be in an ATV accident than one involving a motorcycle (*Am Surg* 2005;71:937).

### **Focus on Prevention**

Planning for a safe summer is no accident! Our goal isn't to put a wet blanket on your summer fun but to merely make you aware that danger is always just a bounce, fall or collision away.

Chiropractic is unique because it focuses on prevention. We're committed to educating our patients on how to minimize the chances of injury. In addition, we encourage our patients to schedule regular chiropractic checkups to ward off vertebral subluxations and related disorders.

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