

PREVENTING SUMMERTIME HEAD INJURIES

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PREVENTING SUMMERTIME HEAD INJURIES

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Summertime always invokes thoughts of freedom for children and adults alike. A break from school and the chance to play softball in the park, swim in the springs, skateboard or ride bikes with friends. Thoughts of ice cream on warm night at the beach are childhood memories we all treasure. As we think of the joys of the summer or a long awaited vacation often, the furthest thing from our mind is that something tragic could happen.

While more than 50% of head injuries occur for late teen and early adult males in auto accidents, many people do not realize that preschool children who fall from windows, playground equipment, trees and other heights comprise another large group victim to concussions and more serious head injuries. It is also sobering to learn that an accidental injury is a greater threat to your child's life or long term well being than any medical disease. One out of five children will require an emergency visit each year for minor to major injuries. According to a chapter by Miller and Miller (In Templer, Hartlage and Cannon: *Preventable Brain Damage*, Springer Publishing Group, New York, 1992), past studies suggest that approximately one million children each year will suffer minor to more severe head injuries, with one out of six being serious enough to require hospital admission. They go on to note the incidence of head injuries in children is almost twice as high for boys (4% vs. 2.5%).

Not surprisingly there is a peak in bicycle-related injuries in the late spring and early summer. Over one-half of injury-related child deaths occur in the summer.

With a few precautions we can help ensure that the joys of summer will not be interrupted. Safety tips at home involve making sure windows are securely screened or locked especially if you have very young children. Hardware stores have plenty of inexpensive safety devices as well as window and door chimes. Ensure that children do not dive into the shallow ends of pools. If there is a diving

board on your pool or a pool that your child will be enjoying, make sure the pool meets standards for diving. With young very active children, take steps to “child proof” your home. Avoid letting children race, wrestle, or take flying leaps in the area of furniture with sharp edges.

Bicycle helmets are very helpful in protecting your child. While many of us did not grow up with these devices, we also grew up at a time when there were few hockey helmets and serious sport injuries were more common. Your insistence on safety will be far more credible if you always wear a helmet. Think about taking helmets with you if you plan on doing some family bicycling at a resort.

The Ian Tilmann Foudnation, Inc. has operated the "Helmet for a Promise" program Florida since 2006. Skaters have made the promise to wear the helmet every time they skate and receive a free skateboard helmet. In six Florida skate parks helemts can be picked up for free. The Helmet for a Promise program has gone national. Log on to www.theiantilmannfoundation.org and download the registration to make the promise. The FREE Helmet is direct shipped to you for a small shipping fee.

Proper child-restraints in vehicles is common sense and is the law. Vehicle manufacturers now advise to keep small children secured in the back seat to avoid potential injuries from passenger side air bags. In our area, horseback riding is popular. Helmets are also important to protect children from falls or from a kick to the head.

Another popular pastime in our area is water sports. Jet skis are fun powerful machines capable of achieving high speeds. Ensure your child has the knowledge, strength, and maturity to operate one properly. Particular caution should be used when boats are in the area since while highly maneuverable, there are no brakes. An unprotected head traveling across the water is no match for the side of a boat. Florida’s abundant rivers, lakes, seashores and pools offer great recreation. Ensure your child learns to swim. There are plenty of organizations, clubs and facilities that will help teach your child to swim.

The Internet has many helpful websites with tips for child safety. Check out the [CPANCF.COM Community and Website resources](http://CPANCF.COM) for links to safety tips from Gainesville Fire and Rescue and other organizations.

If, despite precautions, your child should suffer a head injury, be alert for loss of consciousness, a period of amnesia around the fall, a period of time of unresponsiveness, eyes rolling, nausea, vomiting, visual complaints, severe headache, excess drowsiness, ringing in the ears, or motor signs such as weakness of an arm or leg or tremors. These are signs of concussion or brain injury. Observe the child. Children may have difficulty communicating their complaints. If you suspect a concussion or have any doubts seek medical attention immediately.

With a few proper precautions we can ensure that we will enjoy that long-awaited swim, drive to the beach, or family bicycle ride. The taste of chocolate chip ice cream on a warm summer night is a far better way to end the day than a visit to the local ER. So remember, when it comes to safety, a little advance planning and your example go a long way to prevent one of the biggest risks to your child's health.

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