



FULL OF ENERGY. READY TO LEARN

How to stay healthy, fit and energetic throughout the school year

After weeks of summer holidays, getting back into the school routine can feel like a major adjustment. Late nights give way to early mornings, relaxed days are replaced by timetables, and children once again have to balance classes, homework, sports, extracurricular activities and time with friends.

Being ready for school, however, is about much more than having a packed school bag and a freshly pressed uniform. Children need enough sleep, nutritious food, regular physical activity, adequate hydration and time to rest and recharge. Together, these everyday habits can help support their physical health, emotional wellbeing and ability to make the most of the school day.

The beginning of a new academic year is therefore a perfect opportunity for families to reset their routines and establish healthy habits that can last throughout the year.

One of the most important foundations is sleep. During the summer, children often

stay up later and wake up later. Returning suddenly to early school mornings can leave them tired, irritable and struggling to concentrate.

School-age children generally need considerably more sleep than adults. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends 9-12 hours of sleep per 24 hours for children aged 6-12 and 8-10 hours for teenagers aged 13-18. Good sleep is important for attention, learning, behaviour, emotional wellbeing and overall health.

The solution is not simply to tell children to "go to bed earlier" on the night before school starts. Families can gradually move bedtime and wake-up times closer to the school schedule during the final days of the holiday.

A predictable evening routine can help. School bags and uniforms can be prepared before bedtime, homework materials organised and electronic devices put away in good time. A calm wind-down period can make it easier for children to settle into sleep.

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READYSET SCHOOL

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APPAREL GROUP
EXCEED EXPECTATIONS EVERYDAY

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Teenagers may require particular attention because late-night phone use, social media, gaming and homework can all push bedtime later. Rather than making bedtime a daily argument, families can establish clear expectations and encourage teenagers to understand why sleep matters.

A well-rested child is better prepared to learn, participate and cope with the demands of the school day.

The next priority is breakfast.

After several hours without food overnight, children need nourishment to begin the day. Breakfast does not have to be elaborate or time-consuming. What matters is having a practical, nutritious meal that fits the child's appetite and the family's morning schedule.

Options such as whole-grain toast with eggs, yoghurt with fruit and oats, oatmeal with banana, or a simple sandwich with fruit can provide a useful combination of nutrients.

The American Academy of Pediatrics notes that breakfast provides children with energy to start the day and is associated with benefits for health, wellbeing and aspects of school performance.

Parents should also avoid turning breakfast into a battle. Some children are not hungry immediately after waking, particularly teenagers. In such cases, a smaller breakfast or an easy-to-eat option may be more realistic.

The same principle applies to the school lunch box. Children need food that can keep them going through lessons and activities. A varied lunch can include fruit or vegetables, whole grains and a source of protein, alongside water.

The objective is not to create a "perfect" lunch box every day. It is to establish a generally balanced eating pattern and help children develop healthy food habits.

Parents can involve children in choosing and preparing some of their meals. A younger child might choose between two fruits, while an older child can help prepare a sandwich or organise their lunch box. These small responsibilities also encourage independence.

Hydration deserves special attention, particularly in Qatar's climate.

Children should have easy access to water during the school day, especially when they participate in physical education, sports or outdoor activities. A reusable water bottle can make drinking water part of their normal routine.

Parents can encourage children to drink regularly rather than waiting until they feel very thirsty. Schools can also contribute by making safe drinking water easily accessible. The CDC's school-health guidance specifically identifies access to drinking water as part of a supportive school environment.

Then comes physical activity.

A school day can involve considerable sitting — in classrooms, during homework, while travelling and when using digital devices. Regular movement provides an important counterbalance.

The World Health Organization recommends that children and adolescents aged 5-17 accumulate an average of at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity each day across the week. Activities that strengthen muscles and bones should also be incorporated at least three days a week.

This does not mean children need to spend an hour in a gym or train like professional athletes. Physical activity can be incorporated naturally into everyday life.

Football, swimming, cycling, dancing, running, walking, martial arts, playground games and active family outings can all contribute. Even short periods of movement throughout the day are useful.

The most important factor is enjoyment.

A child who loves swimming may resist football. Another may dislike organised sport but happily ride a bicycle or dance for an hour. Parents should help children discover activities they enjoy rather than treating exercise as punishment or another academic obligation.

Physical activity can also be a valuable way to reduce stress. After spending hours concentrating in class, children may benefit from getting outside, moving their bodies and interacting with friends.

Schools have an important role to play here too. WHO highlights physical activity as part of creating healthier school systems and notes its contribution to educational and learning objectives.

A healthy school routine is not only about sports lessons. Movement can also be encouraged through recess, active classroom breaks, walking and cycling where practical, and extracurricular activities.

At the same time, families need to watch sedentary time.

After school, children may spend hours moving from the classroom to homework, then to television, gaming, social media or other digital entertainment. Technology is an important part of modern childhood, and screens cannot simply be eliminated. The goal should instead be balance.

Parents can establish reasonable boundaries around recreational screen use and ensure that screen time does not consistently replace sleep, physical activity, family interaction or outdoor play.

The same principle applies to homework. Children need time to study, but they also need breaks. Long periods of uninterrupted sitting are rarely the best way to work.

Encouraging children to get up, stretch, walk around or take a short break between tasks can make the school-and-home routine more manageable.

Rest is not wasted time.

This is particularly important for children who have packed schedules. School may be followed by tuition, sports, music, language classes and other activities before homework even begins.

Extracurricular activities can be valuable, but too many commitments can leave children exhausted. Parents should periodically review the family calendar and ask whether the schedule leaves enough time for sleep, meals, play and relaxation.

Children need unstructured time too. Playing with friends, reading for pleasure, drawing, listening to music or simply doing nothing can all provide valuable opportunities to recharge.

Mental wellbeing is another essential part of staying school-ready.

The return after the summer holidays can bring excitement, but it can also bring anxiety. Children may worry about new teachers, difficult subjects, examinations, friendships or fitting into a new class.

Parents can help by keeping communication open.

Instead of asking only, "Did you finish your homework?" parents can ask, "How was your day?" "What was the best part?" or "Is there anything you are worried about?"

Listening is often more useful than immediately offering advice. Children should also understand that asking for help is a strength. If a child is persistently anxious, withdrawn, struggling to sleep, refusing school or showing significant changes in behaviour, parents should consider

discussing the concern with the child's school and an appropriate professional.

Another important element is consistency.

Children do not need to follow a perfect routine every single day. There will be birthday parties, family outings, late nights, missed workouts, school events and mornings when breakfast is rushed.

The objective is not perfection but a healthy pattern over time.

A child who generally sleeps well, eats a varied diet, drinks enough water, stays physically active, takes breaks from screens and has time to relax is developing habits that can extend well beyond the school years. Parents can make this easier by modelling healthy behaviour themselves. Children notice what adults do. If parents prioritise sleep, eat balanced meals, stay active and take time away from screens, children are more likely to see these behaviours as normal parts of everyday life.

The new academic year can therefore be treated as a whole-family reset.

Set a consistent bedtime. Prepare breakfast options in advance. Pack nutritious lunches. Keep water within reach. Build physical activity into the day. Create sensible screen boundaries. Leave time for rest. Talk openly about feelings. And allow children to gradually take responsibility for their own routines.

Schools and families are partners in this process. WHO describes schools as important settings for promoting health and wellbeing, while CDC guidance similarly emphasises the value of school environments that support healthy eating and physical activity.

Ultimately, a healthy student is not simply one who rarely gets sick or performs well in sports.

It is a child who has the energy to participate, the concentration to learn, the confidence to take on challenges and the resilience to recover from a demanding day.

Being school-ready every day begins long before the first lesson.

It begins the night before, with enough sleep. It continues in the morning, with breakfast and hydration. It carries through the school day with movement, nutritious meals and healthy routines. And it continues after school, with exercise, homework, family time, play and adequate rest.

The goal is not to make children follow a rigid schedule. It is to give them a strong foundation from which they can learn, grow and enjoy school.

CLEAN & CONFIDENT SCHOOL HYGIENE ESSENTIALS

As classrooms fill up again, good hygiene habits can help children stay fresh, healthy and ready for the school day



Going back to school after the summer holidays means returning to busy classrooms, playgrounds, school buses, sports activities and shared spaces. With children spending much of their day around classmates, good personal hygiene becomes more important than ever.

Hygiene is not simply about looking clean. Everyday habits such as washing hands, brushing teeth, bathing regularly, keeping nails clean and covering coughs and sneezes can help reduce the spread of germs while keeping children comfortable and confident. The start of a new school year is an ideal time to refresh these habits and make them part of the daily routine.

Make handwashing a habit

One of the simplest and most effective hygiene habits is regular handwashing. Children touch desks, doors, books, sports equipment and other shared surfaces throughout the day before often touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

Encourage children to wash their hands with soap and water before eating, after using the toilet, after playing outdoors, after coughing or sneezing and whenever their hands are visibly dirty. They should wash all parts of their hands, including the backs, between the fingers and around the nails.

When soap and water are unavailable, an alcohol-based hand sanitiser can be useful when used appropriately. Parents can make handwashing easier by keeping soap readily available and teaching children to make it a habit rather than simply reminding them when they forget.

Cough and sneeze smart

Children should be taught to cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and dispose of it immediately. If a tissue is unavailable, using the elbow rather than the hands is preferable. They should also avoid unnecessarily touching their eyes, nose and mouth.

Beyond the hands

Personal hygiene extends beyond handwashing. Daily bathing or showering helps children stay fresh, particularly after sports or outdoor activities. Clean underwear, socks and clothes should be worn regularly, while sweaty sportswear should not be left in school bags for long periods.

Younger children may need reminders or assistance, while older children can gradually take responsibility for their own personal-care routines.

Keep smiles healthy

Oral hygiene deserves equal attention. Children should brush their teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, particularly in the morning before school and at night before bed. Regular dental check-ups should also be part of their healthcare routine.

Making brushing a consistent part of the daily schedule helps children see dental care as a normal lifelong habit rather than something to focus on only when problems arise.

Don't forget nails

Children frequently use their hands to play, handle food and touch their faces. Keeping fingernails short and clean can reduce the accumulation of dirt and germs underneath them. A quick nail check can easily become part of the family's weekly routine.

School bags, lunch boxes and bottles

School bags can quickly collect used tissues, food

wrappers, sweaty sportswear and other forgotten items. Encourage children to empty and organise their bags regularly.

Lunch boxes and reusable water bottles should also be washed frequently. Children should avoid sharing water bottles and utensils, while parents should take appropriate precautions when packing perishable foods, particularly in Qatar's warm climate.

Uniforms and sportswear should be kept clean, and shoes should be aired regularly, especially after sports or outdoor activities.

Lead by example

Children learn best when hygiene becomes part of everyday life. Parents can lead by example by washing their hands, covering coughs, brushing their teeth and maintaining good personal hygiene.

As children grow, gradually give them more responsibility for their own routines—from remembering to wash their hands to keeping their school items and sportswear clean.

The return to school is the perfect opportunity for a hygiene reset: clean hands, brushed teeth, fresh clothes, tidy nails, a clean lunch box, a washed water bottle and an organised school bag.

These may seem like small details, but together they help children feel fresh, comfortable and confident throughout the school day.

Most importantly, good hygiene is not just a back-to-school requirement. It is a lifelong habit that helps build healthier, happier and more confident children.

SCHOOL HYGIENE ESSENTIALS

Small habits for a healthy and confident school day

WASH HANDS
Before eating, after toilet, after play and when hands are dirty.

COVER COUGHS & SNEEZES
Use a tissue or your elbow.

BRUSH TWICE DAILY
Morning and before bed with fluoride toothpaste.

BATHE DAILY
Stay fresh, especially after sports and outdoor play.

KEEP NAILS CLEAN
Trim regularly and keep dirt and germs away.

CLEAN LUNCH BOX & BOTTLE
Wash daily and avoid sharing with others.

KEEP SCHOOL BAG TIDY
Empty and organise it regularly.

WEAR CLEAN CLOTHES
Change daily and keep sports clothes fresh.

STAY HOME WHEN SICK
Rest, recover and protect your classmates. Follow your school's health guidelines.

Good hygiene habits build healthier, happier and more confident children.

CLEAN TODAY, CONFIDENT TOMORROW.

BUILDING THE SKILLS BEYOND THE TEXTBOOK

Beyond grades and textbooks, children need the skills to express ideas, connect with others, solve problems and believe in their ability to make a difference

School is about much more than learning facts, completing assignments and preparing for examinations. While academic knowledge remains important, children also need skills that help them use that knowledge in real-life situations.

Among the most valuable are creativity, communication and confidence.

These qualities can influence how children learn, work with others, respond to challenges and eventually navigate higher education, careers and everyday life. In an increasingly digital world — where artificial intelligence can generate information and complete many routine tasks — the ability to think independently, communicate ideas and approach problems creatively is becoming even more important.

The OECD describes creative thinking as the ability to generate diverse and original ideas and to evaluate and improve ideas. Its PISA 2022 assessment found that creative thinking supports learning, problem-solving and students' ability to approach information in personally meaningful ways.

Creativity is not limited to art.

A common misconception is that creative children are those who are good at drawing, music, drama or writing. These are certainly forms of creativity, but creative thinking is much broader.

A child who finds a different way to solve a mathematics problem is being creative. A student who suggests an unusual approach to a science experiment is being creative. A child who develops a new idea for a school project, finds a better way to organise a team or thinks of several solutions to a problem is also demonstrating creativity.

Creativity begins with curiosity.

Children naturally ask questions: Why does this happen? What would happen if we changed this? Is there another way to do it?

Education should encourage those questions rather than making children afraid of giving the “wrong” answer.

Research from the OECD shows that students who experience classrooms where teachers value creativity, encourage original answers and give them opportunities to express their ideas tend to demonstrate stronger creative-thinking performance.



Parents can encourage creativity at home without expensive equipment or complicated activities. Reading, drawing, building, storytelling, cooking, experimenting, playing music, designing things and even finding different ways to solve everyday problems can give children opportunities to think creatively.

Most importantly, children need permission to experiment.

Not every idea will work. That is part of creativity.

A failed experiment, an unfinished drawing or an unsuccessful approach to a problem can still be valuable if the child learns something from it.

The second essential skill is **communication**.

A child may have excellent ideas, but those ideas have limited value if they cannot be expressed clearly. Communication involves much more than speaking confidently. It includes listening, asking questions, explaining ideas, writing clearly, understanding different viewpoints and responding appropriately to others.

These skills begin developing long before children give formal presentations.

A child explaining why they enjoyed a book is practising communication. A student

discussing a project with classmates is practising communication. Asking a teacher for clarification, listening to another student's opinion or explaining how they solved a problem are all valuable communication experiences.

Good communication is also closely connected to relationships.

Children who can express their thoughts and feelings clearly may find it easier to build friendships, resolve disagreements and seek help when they need it.

Schools can nurture communication through classroom discussions, debates, presentations, group projects, storytelling, drama and collaborative activities. These opportunities allow students to practise expressing ideas in different situations.

Parents can support the same development at home simply by **talking and listening**.

Instead of always asking children questions that require a one-word answer, parents can ask open-ended questions: What did you think about that? Why do you think it happened? What would you have done differently?

The goal is not to turn every family conversation into a lesson. It is to give children regular

opportunities to explain, question and express themselves.

Then comes **confidence**.

Confidence does not mean believing that you are always right or being the loudest person in the room. Healthy confidence means believing that you can attempt something difficult, learn from mistakes, ask for help and try again.

This distinction is important.

A confident learner can say, “I don't understand this yet.”

A confident student can stand up and present an idea even when they feel nervous.

A confident child can make a mistake without believing that the mistake defines them.

“Together, these skills help children become active participants in their education rather than simply recipients of information.”

Confidence develops through experience. Children need opportunities to make decisions, solve problems, speak in front of others, participate in activities and take on responsibilities appropriate to their age.

It also develops when adults focus on effort and progress rather than perfection.

Instead of saying only, “You are very clever,” parents can say, “You worked hard to solve that,” or “You kept trying even when it was difficult.” Such feedback helps children understand that ability can grow through effort and practice.

The OECD's PISA 2022 findings similarly highlight **creative self-efficacy** — students' confidence in their ability to engage in creative thinking — as an important characteristic associated with creative thinking. The report also identifies curiosity and persistence among the characteristics associated with creative thinkers.

Creativity, communication and confidence also strengthen one another.

A creative child needs communication skills to explain an idea. A good communicator needs confidence to share that idea. And confidence can grow when children discover that their ideas are valued and that they can contribute meaningfully.

Together, these skills help children become active participants in their education rather than simply recipients of information.

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