How families can navigate spring break vacations

Spring break offers an ideal respite for families looking to get away from the hustle and bustle of daily life. Students can use a restful spring break to recharge their batteries for the home stretch of the school year, while parents willenjoyapause from work and a school year filled with kids' activities.

A family-friendly spring break will require some planning to ensure such an excursion is within budget and appropriate for travelers of all ages. With that in mind, parents planning a spring break getaway with their children can consider these tips.

• Book flights as early as possible. If the family aspires to take to the friendly skies during spring break, then book flights well in advance so the cost of air travel doesn't bust the budget. According to the affordable travel experts at Dollar Flight Club, fares for flights between mid-March and early April can spike by anywhere from 20 percent to 50 percent. That's because airlines know spring break is a popular time to travel. While booking early might not lead to huge savings, it will give parents more freedom to pick and choose flights based on variables important to them, like flight times and ticket costs. The longer you wait, the more expensive and less accommodating a flight may be.

• Avoid hotspots. Spring break hotspots tend to be overcrowded and a little raucous, which is less than ideal for families with young children. When planning a family-friendly spring break, look for locales off the beaten path. Early to mid-March is peak spring break season for many colleges and universities, so if children's schools let out for spring during this time it may be wise to avoid oceanfront destinations that typically attract lots of college students. If the budget allows, spring break might prove an ideal time for an international trip with the family.

• Emphasize outdoor activities. As winter winds down, people from all ages tend to get a little cabin fever. Come spring break, look for destinations where outdoor activities abound. Access to activities like hiking, kayaking, swimming, and other outdoor favorites can provide a necessary escape from the cold weather back home.

• Visit a big city. Beaches draw crowds come spring break, but cities tend to be less overrun by tourists during this time of year. Consider visiting a big city and taking in all it has to offer. Flights and accommodations to such locales might not cost as much as travel and lodging to oceanfront destinations, so this can be a great time to visit a big city and take advantage of the cultural and culinary offerings it serves up.

Spring break need not be a budget buster for families looking to get away this March or April.

Tips to stay hydrated

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Hydration and electrolyte-replacement products are often marketed with buzzwords and flashy packaging. Originally developed for athletes, these products have found their way to grocery store shelves and are now promoted to the public. In general, we get electrolytes needed for hydration from a balanced diet. But some individuals may benefit from a supplemented source.

Here are some tips on how hydration and electrolytes work together in supporting everyday health and how much your body needs:

What are electrolytes, and how much do I need?

Most electrolytes come from food and drinks we consume. These include sodium, potassium, calcium, magnesium and chloride. Other electrolytes can be made in our bodies and do not directly come from the diet, meaning that we don't have to take in all electrolytes through outside sources.

Individual needs for hydration and electrolytes depend on several factors such as age, body size, health status, daily medications, activity level and more. We can get enough electrolytes and adequate hydration by consuming a balanced diet alongside unsweetened beverages throughout the day.

Individuals who do high labor jobs or activities, especially outdoors in the heat like landscaping and construction, may benefit from additional electrolytes and hydration. Active individuals who engage in intense activity for more than an hour may also need to replenish fluid and electrolytes lost in sweat.

Where do electrolytes come from? How do we stay hydrated?

Hydration is related to electrolyte intake but also includes the amount of fluid we take in through food and drinks. It is important to regularly drink water throughout the day. Unsweetened beverages like coffee, tea, and milk also contribute to hydration status. Foods like fruits, vegetables, and soups also help hydrate.

Electrolytes are found in a variety of foods and in smaller amounts in some water, depending on the source. Some commercially available bottled waters have electrolytes added to them. Coconut water is another option that is naturally rich in electrolytes.

Pay attention to dehydration

Symptoms of dehydration include dizziness, lack of energy, memory trouble, headaches and muscle cramps. If you experience these symptoms, drink water and prioritize foods high in water and electrolytes, like fresh fruits and vegetables. If symptoms like confusion, rapid heartbeat, or fainting occur, seek medical care immediately.

More isn't always better

Many sports drinks and electrolyte mixes have large amounts of minerals like sodium. Too much sodium is a risk factor for high blood pressure and heart disease.

Sports drinks are often high in added sugar, too. If you buy a sports drink with higher amounts of added sugar or sodium, dilute it with water or drink half of the serving instead of the entire beverage.

Let your healthcare provider and pharmacist know if you use electrolyte-replacement products often. Since they have high amounts of minerals, they could interact or interfere with other medications or health conditions.

No matter what, staying hydrated should be a priority. Most people can meet their electrolyte needs with a balanced diet and regular water intake.

Contact your local Green County Extension office for more information.

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