

Safety—Important at Every Age

Many times, when parents of newborns come into my office, I begin to plant the “seeds of safety” into their sleep deprived ears—it will only be a few more months before their sweet, non-mobile newborn will be crawling through the adult world! Exploring, placing any object they can find into their mouths to taste and experience, touching and pulling, poking and picking. It is their destiny in life to be curious and explore. It is your duty to save them from unintentional injuries!

Unintentional injury is the leading cause of death among children 14 years and under according to the National SAFE KIDS campaign. It begins with the natural desire to explore one’s world without the developmental ability to discern what is safe—it can lead to tasting cleaning solutions, eating the medicine pills that looked like candy, not wearing that safety helmet while skateboarding or biking, forgetting to buckle that seat belt. Research shows that almost half of all unintentional injuries occur around or near the home and most occur from May to August. Research also shows that up to 90 percent of unintentional injuries can be prevented.

What can you do? It depends upon your child’s age.

If you have an infant or toddler, I always suggest getting on their level—that’s right, crawl around the house on their level and remove any dangers within their reach. If it’s impossible to make an area safe, put up safety gates that restrict their movement into that room. All cleaning supplies and medications go up, up, up!! Safety lock the cabinets these medications and supplies go into. Don’t forget about plants...some are poisonous and shouldn’t be eaten! Put up and out of reach. Never leave alone in the bathtub, keep away from the toilet (as many children have drowned in the water), have NO access available to the hot tub or pool...the list is long...be vigilant!!

Older children need helmets when riding bikes, scooters, in-line skates or skateboards--knee and ankle pads can also prevent injuries! Don’t compromise on this issue. The leading injury sustained with these activities is a head injury. The helmet should fit snugly and fasten properly—no movement on the head once fastened in place. Practice what you preach and wear a helmet on your own head when doing these same activities! If you start insisting on helmet use from an early age, this will become an automatic habit that could save your child’s life (and your own).

Teenagers...ahhh, what more can be said?? Safety with driving, education on drinking and drug use, discussions on relationships/safe sex, water and ocean safety (especially here on the Central Coast), helmet use with biking or skateboarding, reminders to always wear seat belts! Will your job ever end? Many adolescents are involved in sports which require safety equipment—insist on their use! Don’t let that million dollar smile be smashed to bits because a mouth guard was forgotten.

As a physician, I know your job won’t end when your children grow and leave your home to find their way in the world--I know that your children, grandchildren and even

great grandchildren will benefit from your safety advice. Start now to prevent unintentional injuries—it is a constant process that demands your best! Your children will one day thank you for keeping them safe and alive.

If you would like more information about safety issues with children, please visit the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) website or the National SAFE KIDS Campaign web site. Each of these sites will have plenty of information about safety and how you can make your home a safe place for your child.