

health

Edited by Erica Watson
health@dailytelegraph.com.au, 9288 3000

Celebrity partners

WITH the Australian Open in full swing, tennis fever is in the air. The NSW Corporate Games celebrity tennis day on February 7 offers the chance to play a game with celebrities to raise money for Diabetes Australia-NSW. Champion surfer Layne Beachley, athlete Guy Leech, ex-netballer Liz Ellis, Olympic gold medallist Kerri Pottharst and footballer David Peachey (pictured, with Pottharst) will be among the celebrities auctioned off for a game. Bidding is open until February 1, at Greys Online. **More information:** www.celebritytennisday.com.au



Help for parents

THERE is a new support service available for parents of children under six who have recently been diagnosed with a disability or developmental delay. The Northcott EarlyStart Diagnosis Support (NEDS) is an early-intervention program that works with families by providing emotional support, information and assistance about disability-specific services. It's available at eight locations across the state: Ballina, Central Coast, Coffs Harbour, Hornsby, Newcastle, Parramatta, Penrith and Tamworth. **More information:** 9472 5200, northcott.com.au

Ovarian cancer

EVERY 11 hours an Australian woman dies from ovarian cancer and this year alone 1500 women will be diagnosed with the illness. February is Ovarian Cancer month and an opportunity for all to discover more about the symptoms and effects of this illness. Buy a teal ribbon on February 24 or make a donation at any time throughout the month. Funds go to support, including rural tele-support groups, resources and of course research. **More information:** 1300 660 334, ovariancancer.net.au

A dry month

FEBRUARY marks the start of FebFast, an initiative to get us off the booze to raise funds for organisations assisting those with drug and alcohol abuse problems. Register online and encourage family and friends to join in. Being the shortest month of the year should help. **More information:** febfast.com.au

Family traits

THERE might actually be some scientific evidence to back up the adage, "like father, like son". A recent study at Yale University has found sons of teenage fathers were 80 per cent more likely to have a child before age 20 compared with those born to older fathers. Several factors such as lower education levels among the boys' mothers and growing up in an unsafe neighbourhood are thought to be linked. Behavioural modelling from parents could also play a role, say researchers.

The right ingredients

Nutritious food is vital for the school day, writes **Erica Watson**

THE countdown is on. In just a few days children will be dusting off their backpacks, polishing their shoes and prepping their pencil cases for the new school year.

For some parents it will be welcome relief after five weeks holiday, for others, especially those dropping off little ones for the first time, it might be fraught with nerves.

Either way, readying your child for the new school year is more than just adjusting uniforms, labelling books and organising bus timetables. With childhood obesity fast reaching epidemic proportions (figures show a quarter of school-age children are overweight or obese), nutrition also plays an essential part.

Preparing for the school day should begin well before the morning bell with a hearty breakfast, says dietitian Susie Burrell.

Often said to be the most important meal of the day, it kickstarts the metabolism and according to the Dietitians Association of Australia, breakfast can also improve alertness, concentration, mental performance and memory.

"It's known that children who eat breakfast have lower body weights, concentrate better and are less likely to eat snack foods throughout the day," Burrell says.

Ideally, Burrell says breakfast should fuel youngsters for at least three hours, tiding them over until a mid-morning snack boosts flagging energy levels. So that means steering away from sugary cereals, instead opting for high-fibre, low-GI alternatives.

Given that sugary cereals are promoted heavily on television and supermarket shelves, this can require a little negotiation. But remember, these foods offer little more than tooth decay, so it is worth persisting.

"Most breakfast cereals on the market that are marketed for kids are not low GI and hence not good choices," Burrell says.

As well as low-GI breakfast cereals, try porridge or muesli and serve with low-fat milk.

Protein from eggs and baked beans are other good options, Burrell says. So too, protein shakes or yoghurt. Grain bread is the best for toast.

Make no bones about it, persuading children to eat the nutritious lunch you supply them, rather than bringing it home in a pristine condition the same afternoon, can be tricky.

Keep things interesting with a variety of food and work out your children's likes and dislikes. It make take some trial and error but remember, none of us likes eating the same thing day in day out and the same goes for children. As a guideline, lunchboxes should contain four items, such as a sandwich with protein, one portion of dairy, a snack item less than 400kj and a piece of fresh fruit.

Sounds simple enough, doesn't it? Now, just how to get them to eat it.

This often presents hurdles for parents,



Keep things interesting with a variety of food and work out children's likes and dislikes

including working mum Megan Ten Dam who has two children, five-year-old son Oskar and nine-year-old daughter Isolde.

"Isolde is happy to sit and eat with friends. Oskar, on the other hand is a challenge because he runs around all the time so he doesn't have time to eat lunch," she says.

Given good nutrition is high on the family's agenda, Ten Dam says it has been critical to invest time to find out exactly what her children enjoy eating.

This, she says, has also cut down on the contents of their lunchboxes suffering from

the boomerang effect at the end of the school day. "They have pretty set tastes for what's on the sandwich," Ten Dam says.

"For Oskar it's not about the food, it's about when he's hungry he wants to eat something. For Isolde she wants to eat something that tastes good."

That said, Ten Dam is also conscious of the need to keep their lunch times interesting.

"A couple of times a week they get a treat or some money for the tuckshop," she says.

She will also sit down with them and encourage them to try different types of food



Head check: A mother rakes her child's hair in search of lice (right)

Best ways to combat

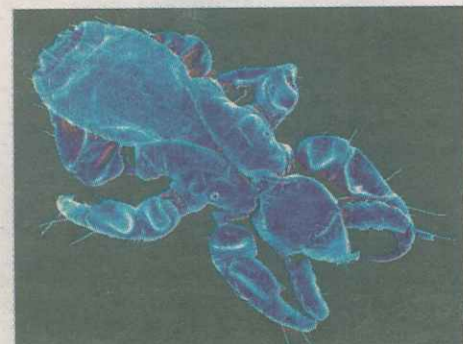
THEY'RE creepy, they're crawly and they have a habit of colonising children's hair faster than you can say their name out loud. We're talking, of course, about nits — otherwise known as lice or louse.

Call them what you will, if you have schoolchildren, the likelihood of coming face-to-face with these tiny parasites at some stage is high.

Nits feed on the scalp, with the females laying eggs (anywhere between three to eight a day) on the hair follicle.

Typically, it is these little white eggs, sometimes as small as a grain of salt, that will flag an infestation. Their position on the scalp indicates how long the little critters have been partying in your child's hair: the further away they are from the scalp, the longer they've been there.

As well as the visible hatchlings, itching or irritation is also likely to occur. Parents tend to panic when they come across these annoying little crawlies. But don't stress or think this means your child is unhygienic.



It's actually quite the contrary says Nadine Ismiel, product development manager for natural head lice solution, NitWits.

She says head lice prefer clean hair. "If the hair shaft is oily or dirty, it makes it harder for the eggs to adhere," she says. "Head lice can live in dirty hair, but they won't be able to reproduce as effectively." A combination of anti-lice shampoo and

for young learners



Good balance: Megan Ten Dam prepares school lunches with Oskar and Isolda
Picture: John Fotiadis

HEALTHY LUNCHBOX



Monday

- Mountain bread wrap with ham and lettuce
- Calci Yum milk or other low-calorie flavoured milk
- Low-GI muesli bar
- One cup of grapes or berries frozen

Tuesday

- Multigrain dinner roll with light cream cheese and turkey
- Cheese and crackers
- Two homemade mini muffins. These can be made from 97 per cent fat-free mix, available from supermarkets.
- Apple

Wednesday

- Six to eight Vita-Weat crackers and two slices of cheese
- Milo snack bar or other snack bar that contains less than 400kj
- Up and Go drink
- Two small peaches

Thursday

- One cup of brown rice with a small can of tuna
- One cup of melon, cut into pieces
- Packet of Vege chips
- One Baby Bel cheese

Friday

- High-fibre white bread sandwich with egg and mayonnaise
- 100g tub yoghurt that has been frozen
- Two Paradise VIVE cookies or other 97 per cent fat-free cookies
- One cup of celery and carrots, cut into pieces

Lunchbox ideas were created by nutritionist, Susie Burrell.



Comfort: A good fit is important when choosing school shoes

Quality is the wise choice for little feet

CHILDREN spend more than 30 hours a week in their school shoes. Add that up over the course of the year and it should be reason enough to invest in a good quality pair.

But if it's not, perhaps the cries of aching feet, coin-sized blisters and gaping holes in soles will.

Australasian Podiatry Council president Brenden Brown says poor-quality shoes offer growing children little more than blisters, pain and discomfort.

Although a cheap alternative in the short term, Brown says poor quality school shoes wear much faster than their quality counterparts, and if they cause the child discomfort, can stop them from participating in play time and sports.

"It sounds minimal but there are actually social implications of that," Brown says.

When buying school shoes, parents should keep in mind fit and function. Brown says quality shoes should never bend or twist in the middle.

"If it does then you have a real problem," he says.

It should, however, be flexible at the toes and the heel area should be firm and not collapse.

Laces, buckles or Velcro should also support the shoe.

Last, and most importantly, choose the correct size.

To help identify this, there should be a pinky finger-sized gap (or about 1cm) between the child's big toe and the end of the shoe, Brown says.

Buying bigger shoes just to save a few dollars will not only mean your child ends up with what Brown describes as "Ronald McDonald" syndrome, they'll also be subject to rubbing and discomfort. To get the best fit possible, children should stand up when they are trying on shoes.

And try making a purchase at the end of the day, when feet have expanded.

By following these few simple tips Brown says, on average, a quality shoe should last up to 12 months.

check up

with
Dr Brian Morton



I fell and hurt my thumb four weeks ago. I thought it would be OK and did not visit my doctor. Although the pain and swelling went within three days, now if I catch it on anything it hurts; I can't make a fist without it hurting in the top knuckle. Any advice would be greatly appreciated.

YOU may have torn the joint capsule with a minor dislocation or at the worst had an avulsion fracture, where the tendon tears off a small piece of bone at the joint. As it is your thumb and four weeks from the injury it is time to have it checked, probably with an X-ray.

I have read honey can be used to put on wounds. Is this true and can it fight infection?

YES. Certain honeys have been shown to have antibacterial actions and help heal chronic ulcers. For simple wounds, cleaning with an antiseptic is probably easier.



I have had a heel spur for more than four months. At first I thought it was a stone bruise, until I couldn't put my foot on the floor in the mornings. I have tried stretching exercises and applied ice packs. My podiatrist made a heel insert, however this has only provided a small amount of relief. Do you have any suggestions?

YOU have a plantar fasciitis, which most people call a heel spur. The fascia stretches from the heel to the base of the toes and it is this that is inflamed. You can stretch it each day by sitting on the side of your bed, rolling the foot over a 350ml can. Maintain the arch of the foot with an orthotic and if all else fails ask your doctor to inject some cortisone and local anaesthetic.

I have just turned 50 and over the past five years I have periodically (two or three times a year) found my left wrist suddenly becomes unbearably painful. It is so bad I can't even hold a toothbrush. There is no swelling or redness and it lasts for three to seven days and disappears as quickly as it comes. After several unsuccessful GP visits, I did some Google diagnosis and came up with "palindromic rheumatism," for which there is no cure. Could you please give your opinion? SOMETIMES this jargon is simply a description rather than a diagnosis. It is time to see a rheumatologist. While it may be autoimmune in nature, gout is also a possibility. Do you have tests done when it is active?

I am a 38-year-old male who trains regularly at the gym and follows a healthy diet, which I supplement with whey protein. I have recently read articles suggesting that whey protein may contain small amounts of steroids and have even seen an article trying to link it to hair loss. Is whey protein safe to use and are there any side effects associated with its use. I MUST admit that I am a sceptic and until there is adequate evidence for whey protein benefit I cannot think other than it being a discretionary way to spend one's money. It is classed as a dietary supplement not a medication and the standards for purity are different to registered medications.

Dr Brian Morton is president of the Australian Medical Association (NSW) and a practising GP. Answers are general advice only and readers should refer to a medical practitioner for a personal consultation.

Send your questions to health@dailytelegraph.com.au

the creepy crawlies

a fine-tooth comb are the best source of attack. Look for preparations with active ingredients such as pyrethrin or malathion. There are also a number of natural alternatives now available. Using ingredients such as eucalyptus and tea tree oil treatments are just as effective.

"Clinical results have shown natural products that use essential oils that are similarly effective as chemical based treatments. They're also free from chemical odour and have minimal skin irritation," Ismiel says.

After shampooing, use a fine-tooth comb to remove any eggs that are left on the hair shaft. Ismiel says this process is effective in breaking the lifecycle. "The eggs are encased in a shell which is difficult to penetrate with a treatment alone," she says. "Combing actually removes the eggs from the hair."

Another alternative is to use conditioner on dry hair then run a fine-tooth comb through the hair. This method works by suffocating the lice, which are then removed

from the hair with a comb. Although this is a chemical-free method, it's much more labour intensive and will need to be repeated at least every two days for two weeks.

As it can take 10 days for eggs to hatch, it's advisable to undergo a second treatment a week later to avoid re-infestation.

"This ensures there are no undetected hatchlings left behind," she says.

It's also recommended the entire family be treated, says Ismiel.

As extra precaution, disinfect brushes and wash hats, pillow slips and sheets in hot water.

Although there's no real way in stopping children from coming home with these nasties, Ismiel says preventative sprays can be effective.

Contrary to old wives' tales, tying or braiding long hair isn't a guarantee, but conducting regular checks can help nip nits in the bud.

Importantly, if your child does have nits, make sure to inform their school or daycare.