

"We have such an issue with obesity," Brown says, "and children eat one or two meals at school." Read the lunch menu and make sure your kids have access to healthy foods at school and at home. On days when the menu isn't healthful, pack a lunch the night before and let the children help. "If they are involved in meal planning, they're not likely to swap lunch."

HOMEWORK

Homework can be a pain, physically. When shopping for a backpack, pick one with wide, padded shoulder straps and a padded back. The contents should weigh less than 20 percent of a child's weight, Brown says. If worn on just one shoulder, the backpack can cause muscle strain. It won't cause scoliosis, Brown assures, but it can lead to significant pain.

When it's time to study, create a technology-free homework space -- no cell phones, internet, Cable or TV. Make sure it's quiet and has good lighting. "Think about what study hall used to look like."

SLEEP

Even teens need bedtime rules. Adequate sleep might keep them from dozing off after lunch. How much is enough? Brown suggests 10-11 hours for children ages 5 to 9; eight-10 hours for ages 10 to 14; and eight-nine hours for ages 15 and older. "Their bodies are still growing. They need more sleep than adults do."

Kids who are sleep-deprived sometimes look as if they have attention deficit disorder, but they really just need more sleep, Brown says.

COMMUNICATION

Kids have school, band/music practice, games practice, debate club. Parents have work, errands and, well, parenting. "It's amazing how over-scheduled our world is," says Brown, who has a lot on her plate.

Dinner time is the time for everyone to gather at the table, she says. "The older children get, it becomes even more important to stay connected" by eating a meal prepared at home and talking to each other. "It's hard, but it should be a priority." Find out who your kids are hanging out with. If you don't know them, get to know them. "Do active listening, that's the key to the communication gap with teens." Let them do the talking while you ask open-ended questions and provide guidance without lecturing.

HOME SCHOOLERS

By home schooling, you don't have to worry about heavy backpacks, bad lunches and separation anxiety. But the lack of social interactions could pose a problem. The solution: Meet with other home schoolers in your neighborhood and set up activities, Brown advises. Overall, "I think home schoolers do great," she says. "More hours with parents, one on one with the child."