

THE MOM & CAREGIVER™

MAY 2017
VOLUME 19 ISSUE 5

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Powerhouse Moms**

Kids' Mental Health
6 Things You Can Do Now

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CONTENTS

EDITORIAL	04
Whispers From Your Daughter	
	05
EVENTS CALENDAR	
May	
	06
NEW BEGINNINGS	
Postpartum Depression: Reach Out and Get Help	
	08
AS THEY GROW	
What Every Parent Needs to Know about Their Kid's Mental Health	
	12
FRANKLY FATHERHOOD	
Thank You Spring!	
	13
BRUSHING UP	
Are Pacifiers Bad for Your Baby's Teeth?	
	14
BIZ SHOWCASE	
Luxe	
	15
ARE WE THERE YET	
Old Fashioned Fun at Knoebels Amusement Resort	
	16
FOSTERING DREAMS, ADOPTING HOPE	
The Gift of Openness	
	17
LIFE BALANCE AND HAPPINESS	
Kids Experience Anxiety Too	
	18
PET FRIENDLY	
Summer Hikes and Parasites	
	19
HEALTH MATTERS	
Coffee? You Decide	
	21
FOOD FOR THOUGHT	
Powerhouse Salad for Powerhouse Moms	
	22
WHOLE HEALTH	
A daring, healthy indulgence to spring you out of winter - French fries!	
	23
SPLASH ON!	
Fitness and Fun	

On The Cover



Yiannis loved the Greek music his Mom played during his photo shoot. A yellow lollipop brought his smile back right after this shot! Thank you to Lovebird Flowers for the gorgeous white tulips (Yiannis gave them to his mom!) and to Little Labels Boutique for our cover kid's cute outfit.

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If you have any comments or suggestions, please contact us at 519.652.9226 or at editor@themomandcaregiver.com.

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WHISPERS FROM YOUR DAUGHTER



"A mom's hug lasts long after she lets go." Author Unknown

Dear Mama,

I am speaking to you from a secret silent place that I so often visit but never share. It is springtime, the season when trees and flowers begin to reach out with new life, the time when birds start to sing, and the time when we take a moment to remember and honour our Mothers on Mother's Day.

My heart reaches out to you, my dear Mama. Let my thoughts be carried to you, on the gentle winds of love and remembrance. Hear the whispers from my soul.

I miss you Mama. I miss talking to you every morning. Oh, if only I could hear your voice again.

Sweet are the memories when I, as a little girl, would love to kiss your red lips, hoping that your lipstick would transfer onto mine so I could be as beautiful as you.

I close my eyes and can taste the incredible rice you would cook for us, seasoned with love, spice and everything nice.

You cared so much when helping others. You required nothing in return; your reward was the joy you truly felt.

Mikaeel remembers his "Nanee." You touched his little life so profoundly that he often speaks of you. He talks of how you loved him and how you told him so.

You showed you loved me, through the things you would do for me, but I regret so deeply that you could never say "I love you." To this day, I long to hear those words. But, culture got in the way. You are the blood of my blood. With your upbringing in a faraway country and me being raised and influenced by a culture foreign to you, clashes and challenges arose. We paid a price for this over time and in temperament.

Mama, I was not rebellious and I never wanted to hurt you. I was a child growing up in a different time and place. I could not close the door and think that the world outside of our home did not exist. I was and forever will be your daughter. However, I was, in our years together, also a child of the new culture you delivered me in to. I could not stand still in time.

On Mother's Day, I will place a flower on your resting place and let my spirit reach out to you.

I will eat from the sweet mint you planted and savour each little bite as if I were embracing you.

I know that I am not alone, and that others experience the mix of emotions that touch our hearts with love and lash our memories with regret.

Happy Mother's Day Mama and to all mothers wherever you are.

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MAY EVENTS

05/2017

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1 Gay Lea Dairy Heritage Museum Opening day Aylmer	2 Books for Babies LPL, Westmount	3 Ignite London - Education Aeolian Hall	4 Paint & Culture Night Museum of Ontario Archaeology	5 Kids' Used Clothing and Equipment Sale by the LMBA Western Fair	6 May 5-6 Quilt Show - Quilting in the Village Wesley-Knox United Church
7 May 5-7 Three Cathedrals Choral Festival St. Paul's Cathedral	8 Storytime LPL, Central	9 Wacky Word Fun LPL, Beacock	10 Expo Explore: Light and Shadow Museum London	11 May 11-14 Beehive - The 60's Musical Original Kids Theatre Company	12 May 11-21 Twelfth Night Palace Theatre	13 Saturday Morning Walk Euston Park
14 MOTHER'S DAY May 13-14 Mother's Day Brunch Fanshawe Pioneer Village	15 Wild Kratts - LIVE! Centennial Hall	16 May 15-17 Pint of Science Festival Poachers Arms & Fox and The Fiddle	17 Beginning with Toddler and Storytime LPL, Beacock	18 Riverdance - The 20th Anniversary World Tour Budweiser Gardens	19 London Majors Labatt Memorial Park	20 May 20-21 - Hockey Night in Canada's Play On! 4 on 4 Street Hockey Tournament Victoria Park
21 Imagination Station Museum London	22 Queen Victoria's Birthday and Garden Party Fanshawe Pioneer Village	23 Kiwanis Music Festival of London - Stars of the Festival Concert Centennial Hall	24 150 Years of Innovation in London Innovation Works	25 CLAP with Claire London Children's Museum	26 Playgroup LPL, Cherryhill	27 Grickle Grass Festival London Children's Museum
28 Jet Blast Jet Aircraft Museum	29 Storytime LPL, Central	30 May 30-June 10 London Fringe Festival Various locations	31 Playgroup LPL, Byron	For More Details and Events Visit  Your Online Parenting Resource		

May 13-14 Mother's Day Brunch Fanshawe Pioneer Village	May 19 London Majors Labatt Memorial Park	May 22 Queen Victoria's Birthday and Garden Party Fanshawe Pioneer Village
May 18 Riverdance - The 20th Anniversary World Tour Budweiser Gardens	May 20-21 Hockey Night in Canada's Play On! 4 on 4 Street Hockey Tournament Victoria Park	May 24 150 Years of Innovation in London Innovation Works

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POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION: REACH OUT AND GET HELP

Having a baby can be one of the happiest and most magical life experiences. It's also a very daunting launch into a new role of great responsibility. Many women experience the "baby blues," a short-lived episode of sadness following delivery. These feelings are often complicated by a sense of guilt over feeling sad during what should be a time of joy. Baby blues are experienced by 70 to 80 per cent of women.

Postpartum depression (PPD) is a longer

lasting, deeper depression that affects 10 per cent of women. The primary cause of PPD is the hormonal roller coaster that occurs after delivery. Adapting to a new role, transitions in relationships with partners, financial stressors, lack of sleep and the myriad of other stressors that occur after having a baby contribute to PPD. Untreated PPD can lead to a more chronic depression. In its darkest form, PPD can also lead to thoughts of self-harm and thoughts of harm to others, including baby.



PPD often goes unrecognized

The busy job of caring for a new baby and the guilt and shame of feeling down in a "happy time" contribute to the silence around PPD. If you experience symptoms of depression after pregnancy or know of a loved one who experiences symptoms, there is a standardized and validated tool called the Edinburgh Postpartum Depression Scale (EPDS).

This 10-item questionnaire can be helpful in diagnosing PPD:
www.fresno.ucsf.edu/pediatrics/downloads/edinburghscale.pdf

PPD is treatable

Support, counselling and medication are all potential options for treatment. Reach out, acknowledge that it exists and get help!

Local resources

- Post-Partum Support Group, call 519-472-7719 for phone support.
- Talk to supportive and understanding friends, family or partner.
- Call the Distress Centre, if necessary, at 519-667-6711.
- Contact the Middlesex-London Health Unit at 519-663-5317. 📞

Dr. Bhooma Bhayana is a family physician in London and the mother of two young men. She continues to find wonder and enjoyment in family practice despite more than 25 years on the job!



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What Every Parent Needs to Know about Their Kid's Mental Health

Did you know that early childhood is when we have the greatest impact on helping our children to reach their full potential?

From birth to age three, your child's brain is developing at its fastest rate. During this time, his brain is building its foundation at a pace of 700 new neural connections every minute! The strength of the foundation depends on the environment your child grows up in. A strong foundation leads to healthy development, both physically and mentally.

What helps children thrive?

1) Taking time to work on building a strong, loving relationship during everyday interactions.
Your child's first and most important relationship is with you. You already do many things to help build a healthy relationship with your child and make them feel loved. You build your relationship with your baby each time you respond to his cries by picking him up, talking to him and calmly trying to figure out what he is telling you. Even toddlers still need you to try to figure out what they are communicating or need help with. Each time you respond positively to your child, she learns about trust and security – the heart of loving relationships.

2) Having a safe environment, free from dangers, conflict and abuse, where your child can explore and learn.

For optimal mental health, your child needs to feel safe to explore but know he can return to you when

he needs reassurance and comfort.

3) Teaching your children how to recognize, talk about and cope with their emotions.
Accept and name feelings: "You seem sad. Can you tell me about it?" Be with them in that emotion. For example, "When I feel upset I listen to music because it helps me feel better. Do you want me to put on some music?"

4) Healthy coping strategies
Even children experience stress. Healthy coping strategies may not eliminate stressors but can help us thrive despite them. Be a role model of coping strategies to help your child. Take deep breaths when you're upset. Do relaxing activities together like reading, colouring or yoga.

5) Including physical activity, healthy eating and adequate sleep into your family's daily routine.

6) Having a support circle.
Support may come from family, friends or a community organization, such as a faith-based group. Talk to your healthcare provider. They can offer comfort and connect you to other supports. Visit www.healthunit.com/early-child-development-social-emotional for more information, including supports in London and Middlesex County. #LittleMindsMatter

Sarah Ingram, RN, Public Health Nurse
Middlesex-London Health Unit



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The Wild Kratts Live! promotional graphic features the two Kratt brothers, Chris and Martin, in their signature blue and green suits, jumping joyfully. The title 'WILD KRATTS LIVE!' is prominently displayed in large, stylized yellow and red letters. The event details, including the date, time, and location, are listed in bold yellow text. At the bottom, there is a call to action for ticket purchases, along with the PBS Kids logo and the Jones Entertainment Group logo.

THANK YOU SPRING!

It was Sunday morning and, for once, we didn't have plans. We are usually a pretty busy family on the weekends but THIS chilly Sunday was going to be a day of rest, PJs, warm coffee, and maybe snuggling up with a good book. Then I remembered... we have kids.

The day started at five a.m. when our three-year-old crawled sleepily into our room asking if it was time to get up. I scooted him back to his bed and reminded him that when the clock says seven, he can get up. It seemed like eight minutes later and he was back into our room, lights ablaze, with his full "outdoor voice" announcement – the sun is up! It's seven! I was shocked to realize he was right... the other shock came from his brother's room. Our 16-month-old was likely startled by the volume of the grand announcement.

I was running solo that morning and both bubbly boys were bouncing since breakfast. It wasn't even 10 a.m. and I had enough of the yelling, the banging, the toy throwing, and the demands for attention. I wanted to lock myself up in the bathroom for just a few minutes of peace. As I drank the last gulp of my now cold coffee, I looked out the window at the



wet and cold morning. Ah, screw it – we need to get outside! After world-war-lunch I wrapped them up, grabbed the stroller, the glider bike, and the almost-too-small-but-still-fits helmet and we hit the pavement.

The crisp air cooled my hot head and I was instantly relieved that we got out of the house. I was reminded of how long this winter felt and how busy our lives have been. Our active boys need to stay on the move and they probably don't even remember being able to just go outside in the backyard and enjoy the freedom of outdoor play. It's no wonder we were driving each other mad!

After an hour-long walk, one kid easily agreed to a nap once we got home and the other was already asleep in the stroller. Both went down without a fight. It's now three p.m. and I don't dare wake anyone up! Well, not until I finish my delicious warm coffee and the next chapter of my book. ☺

Frank Emanuele is a proud father of two sons and special education teacher for the local public school board. When not parenting or educating, Frank enjoys cooking, photography, movies and video games.

Are Pacifiers Bad for Your Baby's Teeth?

We've all been there. Your baby starts to cry and the only thing that seems to soothe them is a pacifier. But many parents have concerns that the use of a pacifier can have a negative impact on their child's oral development. Are those concerns founded? Unfortunately, yes.

The regular use of a pacifier can cause growing mouths to develop improperly in some ways. That can lead to problems with tooth development and other issues. The long-term use of a pacifier can impact the shape of

the mouth and the alignment of the teeth, as growing jaws will form around anything held in the mouth on a repeat basis. Evidence shows that overuse of pacifiers can have much the same effects on the mouth as long-term thumb-sucking.

It's not necessary to avoid pacifier use altogether, however. Pacifiers are still emotionally beneficial to babies, and it's possible to avoid the risk of long-term damage. The trick is to wean the child from pacifier use before his/her second birthday, after which point the

risk of permanent long-term damage increases significantly. Offer (tooth friendly!) rewards for going pacifier-free, and provide snuggles and other forms of reassurance when the pacifier is reached for in high-anxiety situations. ☺



Dr. Sanjay Agrawal and his team strive to provide compassionate, comprehensive and comfortable dental care to all of their patients, especially the kids.

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Old Fashioned Fun at Knoebels Amusement Resort

The looming wooden roller coaster sets the stage for the Knoebels amusement park experience. Think back to the days when rides, cotton candy and theme park fun came at a reasonable price, and licensed characters didn't dominate.

Knoebels Amusement Resort is old-school charm with modern day value. With no alcohol, a dress code and signs clearly prohibiting foul language, this is family fun with minimal stress. Bring your own food, and even the dog.

Located in Elysburg, Pennsylvania, the family-owned 90-year-old Knoebels has been updated throughout the years with 60 bigger and faster rides and a waterpark, but no bigger or faster prices – admission is free and you can buy single ride tickets or an all-day ride wristband for \$40.

Parking is also free and food is reasonable and varied. Be daring and try the deep fried pickles on a stick, though I recommend pierogis or potato pancakes. Families are welcome to bring picnics and make use of sheltered tables and charcoal

barbeques.

Knoebels started in 1926 with a concrete swimming pool on a popular farm site already dotted with concession stands. It grew into a fair, and in 1942 the hand-carved 1913 Grand Carousel was added – still one of the largest in the world with 63 horses. The oldest ride in the park is the merry-go-round in Kiddie Land carved in 1912. www.knoebels.com

Sherri Telenko is a freelance writer and blogger living in Southern Ontario. Sign up for travel and trail riding ideas at www.horsetrotting.net or follow her on twitter @SherriTelenko.



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The Gift of Openness

My foray into motherhood was an emotional and hair-raising roller coaster ride. We all experience different emotions as we venture into the unknown abyss of parenthood. Mine wasn't exactly the thrill ride I was looking for.

My husband and I wanted a family. We struggled with infertility for several years and we chose to pursue adoption over other methods. Our dreams came true when we were matched with a cute three-year-old bundle of curiosity and endless energy in September 2009.

We were just settling into everyday family life after celebrating our first Christmas together and looking forward to the New Year when our dream came crashing down with the sudden death of my husband. Our new life as a family of three had lasted just 109 days. In an instant, the path I had known no longer existed. I was left to create and build a new dream for just the two of us, or so I thought.

I did not allow the fear of the unknown to debilitate us. I embraced the future and explored what it would mean for us. As we grew into our new reality, I knew I had a responsibility to keep teaching my son his life story. We speak openly about his adoption and he has plentiful time with his birth family. He knows no boundaries between adoptive and birth family. He just knows

that they are family and they are here to love, support and guide him into adulthood.

My son has two Moms who love and adore him to the ends of the earth and share in the same desire that he grows into the best young man he can be. I believe in the immense benefits of open adoption as it is constantly changing and evolving. To make an adoption work in today's society, it means the inclusion of all.

I have adopted twice now with a third one pending. Never in a million years did I ever see myself as a proud Mama of three beautiful souls. Each child experiences the gift of openness and I can only see the benefit. I see love multiply, and the enrichment of the birth family is a gift that should never be ignored. Their respective birth families provide a history lesson that I could never possibly offer. Each year as I celebrate Mother's Day, I reflect on my children's birth mothers as I am always indebted to them as they gave me the gift of motherhood. 🌸

“...immense benefits of open adoption...”

Theresa D. has been an adoptive and foster parent with the London Middlesex CAS since 2009. She has three children: Nick, Lily and Savannah.

Kids Experience Anxiety Too

Life Balance

Happiness and Fulfillment

The feeling of anxiety is overbearing and frightening for a child, especially if the parents don't acknowledge or talk about it. Children and adults experience anxiety the same: constant and unreasoned fear, feeling lonely or sad, feeling powerless, headache or digestive problems.

Children's anxiety can show up as angry tantrums or defiant behaviours, which are strongly disapproved of by adults, and this adds to anxiety and conflict.

If you recognize five of these traits, your child may be suffering from anxiety:

- Pessimism and negative thinking patterns, such as imagining the worst
- Constant worry about things that might happen or have happened
- Rigidity and inflexibility, self-criticism, guilty thoughts
- Anger and aggression
- Restlessness, irritability and tantrums
- Opposition and defiance
- Excessive crying
- Physical complaints, like stomach aches, headaches, fatigue
- Avoiding things or places
- Difficulties falling or staying asleep, nightmares or night terrors
- Perfectionism
- Excessive clinginess and separation anxiety

- Procrastination
- Poor memory and concentration
- Withdrawal from activities and family interactions
- Eating disturbances
- Repetitive and routine actions or reactions

Anxious children can be demanding and become very emotional if things don't go their way. It's confusing for parents about when to be firm and whether they should give in to avoid emotional outbursts.

Don't feel guilty if your child has anxiety. We can't change yesterday, but today you can learn how to change tomorrow. Next month, I'll outline how to assist your anxious child.

Fun this month: Plan your favourite sit down dinner and talk about what anxiety means, how it makes you act and what makes each family member feel safe and calm. Give everyone a chance to learn how to talk about anxiety and what helps so you can support each other. 🌸

Emily Beeckmans is educated as a social worker and is a trauma specialist. As a private practitioner, she strives to educate clients and the public about the importance of emotional health and well-being. Emily offers you a safe place to dig into your thoughts, feelings and life choices.

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Summer Hikes and Parasites



Living in Southern Ontario, we have easy access to campgrounds, trails and parks to enjoy during the warmer months. For many dogs, this convenience brings many opportunities to explore nature with their beloved families! Unfortunately, while your dog is busy enjoying family time in the long summer grass, they become a target for dangerous parasites that are commonly found in this region.

Deer ticks, which can be carriers of Lyme Disease, wait on long grass to have access to a host. When an unknowing pet passes, they transfer onto its body and burrow in its skin to feed. If a tick carrying the disease is attached for more than two days, it can be transmitted to the host.

Dogs affected with the disease have been described to be "walking on eggshells" with generalized severe pain and reduced

appetite. The symptoms can also come and go, making diagnosis difficult. While typically found in pets, ticks can also transmit the disease to humans. In 2015, pop singer Avril Lavigne was diagnosed with Lyme Disease after eight months of ongoing illness. The disease's vague symptoms make it dangerous and difficult to diagnose in pets and humans, although it presents differently in human hosts.

If you have a dog or cat that goes outdoors, inspecting their skin and coat for unwanted hitch-hikers can keep these parasites from feeding on your furry friend. Should you find a tick, have it removed promptly, then monitor your pet for any changes in behaviour and contact your veterinarian if you have any concerns. Removing the tick can be tricky because twisting or breaking the tick (leaving its "head" in the skin) can leave your

pet prone to infection. Because of this, we advise against trying to remove the tick at home and encourage you to contact your veterinary team for assistance. They can remove it or have tick removal tools they can give you.

The best way to prevent Lyme Disease is to talk to your veterinarian about tick preventatives. Administering a preventative will keep ticks away from your pet, giving you the peace of mind of knowing your pet is protected. Your pet can then go off-road freely, enjoying all the sights, sounds and smells that our beautiful Ontario summers have to offer! 🐾

Dr. I. Wonder is here to answer your questions regarding your furry family members. If you have a question, email it to us at brent@NeighbourhoodPetClinic.com. Our team at Neighbourhood Pet Clinic will tap into their collective experience to answer your questions.

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Living your Best Life

Caffeine – everyday necessity or occasional treat? Flavoured teas, decaf coffee, green juices or even warm water with lemon juice are great alternatives to experiment with in lieu of your regular caffeinated pick me up. Whichever way you prefer to consume your coffee, there are both health benefits and hindrances to consider.

Aside from the usual benefits such as alertness, concentration, mood and performance, caffeine has several lesser known benefits, including:

1. Reduced muscle pain

Some researchers have found that caffeine may stimulate the release of B-endorphins and hormones that depress the sensation of pain or discomfort.

2. Faster effects of medications

Caffeine constricts blood vessels and helps the body absorb medications more quickly, which is why it's added to some pain medications.

3. Disease prevention

Caffeine keeps dopamine molecules active, preventing diseases like Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. Harvard researchers have found that men who drink four cups of caffeinated coffee a day are half as likely to develop Parkinson's disease as those who refrain from consuming caffeinated beverages.

Health hindrances

On the flip side of the caffeine debate are the many hindrances of caffeine, such as stress, blood sugar swings, nu-

tritional deficiencies, male and female health problems, adrenal exhaustion, emotional disturbances and aging.

Bottom line, caffeine is a drug and, if used in moderation, we'll have a better chance of absorbing the benefits while reducing the potential risks of health hindrances. As a health coach, my advice to my clients is that we could all benefit from a caffeine break for 14 days, two to three times a year. 🐾

Rene Beaulieu is a Certified Health Coach and business professional who is passionate about working with people to improve their health, family and work life. Learn more at healthseekersinc.com.

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Powerhouse Salad for Powerhouse Moms

Let's keep Mom healthy and happy this Mother's Day! Here's a powerhouse salad full of nutritious foods that you can make for Mom.

Mom's Powerhouse Salad

- ¾ cup sodium reduced chicken stock
- ¾ cup whole wheat couscous
- ½ cup thawed frozen corn
- ½ cup diced green pepper
- ½ cup cherry tomatoes, cut in 4
- 1 cup canned black beans, drained and rinsed
- ¼ cup green onion, chopped
- 1 T cilantro, packed
- Juice of 1 lime
- 1 T olive oil
- 1 tsp cumin
- ½ tsp black pepper
- Grated cheese
- Spinach leaves, rinsed

Directions:

1. In a small pot, bring the chicken stock to a boil. Turn off the heat and add the couscous. Let it sit for 5 minutes and then fluff with a fork and transfer it to a large bowl.
2. Add the rest of the ingredients and toss. Top salad with grated cheese.
3. Chill for 1 hour and up to 2 days. ❄️

Heather Thomas, PhD is a Registered Dietitian from London who strives to find balance in her professional and family life while enjoying the occasional chocolate chip cookie along the way!



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WHOLE HEALTH

A daring, healthy indulgence to spring you out of winter – French fries!

Shake off those winter blahs like a big-hair, thrashing 80s rock star. Whether you're plenty ready or not quite there yet, a return to warmer weather gives us an increase in energy and helps us wake up from that brain fog that seems to stick around during the cold months.

Spring is an ideal time to regenerate and renew your body, boost your stamina, kick start your digestion, improve your immunity and maybe even drop some of that unwanted winter insulation. By increasing your intake of vegetables, you can revive both your meals and your health, no crazy hairstyle required.

Root vegetables are one of nature's whole, unprocessed, mineral-rich foods. Turnip, carrot, parsnip, rutabaga, kohlrabi, potato, zucchini, celery root and daikon radish are some of the most common finds at your local grocer. We've reinvented a rock star for all ages in this classic favourite indulgence that is antioxidant-rich, baked and healthy. Serve it as an impressive side dish or a meal all on its own. (Tip: Sweet potatoes and zucchini soften faster, so add them 10 minutes later in the baking time to ensure they don't get mushy.)

Za'atar Dusted Veggie Fries
Dairy free, gluten free, vegetarian
Serves 4 to 6

8 medium	red potatoes, peeled and sliced lengthwise into 3- x ½-inch (8 x 1 cm) strips
4 large	carrots, peeled and sliced lengthwise into 3- x ½-inch (8 x 1 cm) strips
2 large	sweet potatoes, peeled and sliced lengthwise into 3- x ½-inch (8 x 1 cm) strips
1 medium	turnip, peeled and sliced lengthwise into 3- x ½-inch (8 x 1 cm) strips
1 medium	rutabaga, peeled and sliced lengthwise into 3- x ½-inch (8 x 1 cm) strips
1 Tbsp (15 mL)	grapeseed oil
2 Tbsp (30 mL)	za'atar
	Sea salt, to taste (optional)

Preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C). Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper and set aside. Toss the sliced vegetables with the oil in a large bowl. Dust with the za'atar seasoning and salt (if using), and spread on the prepared baking sheet. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes or until the edges are crispy and golden. Serve with tomato ketchup or a yogurt mayo with dill.

TIP: Za'atar is a vibrant Middle Eastern blend of fragrant spices most often containing sumac, thyme, marjoram, roasted sesame seeds, oregano and sometimes salt. If the blend you purchase does not contain salt, you can add it in this recipe. You can also make your own za'atar with ½ cup ground sumac, 1 Tbsp each of dried thyme, dried marjoram and dried oregano, 2 tsp roasted sesame seeds and ½ tsp kosher salt. 🌱

Recipe from: *Vegetarian Any Day* (Penguin Random House)
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Carolyn Hemming (and co-author, Patricia Green) are the authors of seven bestselling cookbooks in three languages with easy recipes and accessible ingredients. Carolyn is an active mother and businesswoman who lives with her family in London.

How to Help Your Child Learn to Love The Water

Splash On!

Fitness and Fun

Children are very good at reading new situations and quickly decide if a new situation is something to embrace immediately or be afraid of. In most cases, a young child's first exposure to "structured activities" is a swimming lesson.

If a parent has decided that swimming is a life skill that must be learned, then swimming lessons will be on the list long before the first day of kindergarten and likely before skating, hockey or gymnastics. This alone makes it a frightening experience for most youngsters. Add in a new facility, the process of getting into

your suit and the long walk out to a pool deck that's filled with "strangers," it's no wonder that even as parents we're filled with some apprehension on the first day of swim class.

Top three tips to make swim lessons more enjoyable

1. Keep the environment comfortable. Nothing will make the experience harder to enjoy than getting into a cold pool. Water that's at least 85°F will go a long way to helping kids get over their fear of the water.

2. Small classes. Limiting the class to no more than five children will ensure they get lots of attention from their swimming teacher.

3. Stay in lessons continuously. Whether for bedtime, dinnertime or swimming lessons, a regular schedule works best. The more consistently children are working on a skill, the faster they'll learn. Learning to swim is no different.

Happy swimming! 🌊

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