You might think strokes only happen to older adults. But it’s one of the top 10 causes of death in children and teens. Childhood strokes most often happen before age 1, and babies can even have them before or right after birth.

“A stroke occurs when blood flow to the brain is interrupted, either by a blocked or burst blood vessel,” says Ian Butler, M.D., a pediatric neurologist affiliated with Children’s Memorial Hermann Hospital and professor of child and adolescent neurology at The University of Texas Medical School at Houston. “Because strokes are often linked to old age, parents and doctors may not suspect them in young patients.”

Teens and children sometimes have the same stroke symptoms as adults. These include headaches, trouble seeing or speaking, and weakness or numbness on one side of the body. However, they’re also more likely to experience signs such as passing out, seizures, breathing problems and trouble swallowing.

When it comes to treatment, every moment counts. Take a child with these signs to the Emergency Center. The doctors there will perform imaging tests to diagnose or rule out a stroke.

Risk factors for heart and vascular disease lead to most adult strokes. These conditions are less common in young people. In children, strokes are often linked to congenital heart defects, head or neck injury, infections such as chicken pox, blood clotting disorders and sickle cell disease. In one-third of cases, an underlying cause isn’t found.

“To treat a childhood stroke, doctors first try to determine the cause,” says Dr. Butler. “Most often, they’ll stabilize your child by giving oxygen, stopping seizures and controlling fever. They’ll then give medications that thin the blood. Surgery can also help in some cases.”

After a stroke, some children have lifelong difficulties, including trouble with speech and language. Between 10 percent and 30 percent of children who have one stroke may have another one, so they must be watched closely, especially in the first days and weeks afterward.
Sometimes, pregnancy puts a lot of stress on the body, including the bladder. Carrying a baby’s weight can weaken a woman’s bladder-control muscles.

“Up to 24 percent of new moms develop stress urinary incontinence,” says Gazala Siddiqui, M.D., a urogynecologist affiliated with Children’s Memorial Hermann Hospital and an assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology at The University of Texas Medical School at Houston. “They may leak urine if they lift something heavy, sneeze, cough or laugh. Bladder control can return on its own after childbirth. But when it doesn’t, pelvic floor muscle physiotherapy, including Kegel exercises, may help.”

A Combined Approach Is Shown Effective

In a recent study, researchers divided subjects into three groups. Two groups received weekly rehabilitation sessions with a trained professional, which consisted of electrical stimulation, biofeedback and a supervised exercise program. In addition, one group took part in deep abdominal muscle training. The third group of women had no training of any kind – only eight weekly massage sessions.

More than 70 percent of women who used exercises and electrical stimulation for eight weeks had no leaks. Beforehand, the women had suffered from weekly leakage after giving birth. The additional abdominal training proved to be unhelpful.

What about those lucky women who had massages for eight weeks? They might have been more relaxed, but they didn’t see any improvement in their bladder-control problems.

Trainees Improve Results

Pelvic floor muscle physiotherapy involves Kegel exercises, which work the same muscles you use to stop the flow of urine. Kegel exercises have long been praised for helping with urinary incontinence. While these exercises may seem easy enough to do at home, research shows that women who are supervised by trained professionals have better results.

Without treatment, incontinence may last for years. If you’re a new mom and still have urinary leaks six weeks after giving birth, talk with your doctor. For a physician referral, call 713.222.CARE (2273) or visit childrensmemorialhermann.org.
Budget-friendly summer activities for kids

You’ve had this problem before. School is out for the summer and you’re scrambling to find things to keep your kids occupied – things that won’t bust your budget. With a little effort and teamwork, you can keep your children busy with healthy – and even educational – activities that are low-cost or free.

Make a Plan
Gather the kids to talk about the summer. Begin by reviewing the plans you’ve already made – vacations, summer school or camps. A large calendar makes this easy. Then start filling in gaps with some old-fashioned brainstorming. Remind children that some ideas may need to be trimmed down so they fit the family budget.

If ideas are hard to come by, here are some ways to get those creative juices flowing:
- Ask other family members, friends and neighbors for ideas. Invite them to join you, if possible; the more the merrier.
- Check your local parks and recreation department Web site. They often offer free or low-cost programs, as well as maps for local parks and pools.
- Check your local library, which should have information about happenings and perhaps travel guides to your area. The library may also have free programs to keep kids busy – and reading – all summer.

Free Time Is OK, Too
When you’ve finished brainstorming and reviewed your calendar, you’re going to see holes – and that’s OK.

Leave room for spontaneity. Go bike riding as a family. Hike a local walking trail. Picnic at a local park. Plant a backyard garden. Encourage your kids to come up with things they can organize themselves to do, such as playing cards, writing in a journal, performing a skit, doing a puzzle, reading, building a fort or conducting a treasure hunt.

yogurt popsicles

1 cup plain low-fat or fat-free yogurt
1 banana, sliced
1 tsp. vanilla
1 cup fruit juice or fruit chunks

1. Blend ingredients together and pour into small paper cups.
2. Freeze.
3. Place a plastic spoon or Popsicle stick in each cup when yogurt mixture is half frozen.
4. To serve, turn cup upside down and run hot water over it until the Popsicle slips out. Keep the cups to use as a holder.

Makes four or five small Popsicles.

Find more kid-friendly recipes online. Visit childrensmemorialhermann.org/resources. You can then search for recipes under the Kids Health section.
Ensure Your Child Is Healthy for School This Fall

RediClinic, which is affiliated with Memorial Hermann, is your convenient source for back-to-school healthcare. Located inside 16 Houston area H-E-B stores, RediClinic offers school and sports physicals, along with the state-required 2010-2011 immunizations.

During a physical,* a clinician evaluates your child’s medical history. The exam is then performed, checking your child’s physical health from head to toe. A clinician also ensures that your child is up-to-date with immunizations.

Visit RediClinic for back-to-school healthcare today! RediClinic is open seven days a week, with no appointments – www.RediClinic.com.

*Each patient will receive a printed assessment with the results. Please be sure to bring all required forms related to the physical, including the completed health and immunization history and any required forms. These forms will be stamped by a clinician and will refer to the results listed on the RediClinic form.

Keep children safe this summer

Many of summertime’s pleasures carry health risks for children. Pediatrician Rachel Baker, M.D., who is with Memorial Hermann Medical Group and affiliated with Children’s Memorial Hermann Hospital, provides the following simple precautions that can help your children avoid common summer hazards.

Bad Bugs
- Serious reactions to bee and wasp stings, indicated by hives, dizziness or shortness of breath, require immediate medical attention. Call 911.
- Mosquitoes can carry West Nile virus, which can be fatal. To stay safe, consider keeping children indoors during dawn and dusk, when mosquitoes are most active. Apply an insect repellent that contains no more than 30 percent DEET.

Heat Hazards
- Have children avoid vigorous activity during the hottest part of the day, between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Be sure they drink plenty of water, especially before, during and after doing strenuous activities. They should avoid caffeinated sodas, which can cause dehydration.

Water Safety
- Teach children to swim. If you can’t teach them, enroll any child age 1 and older in swimming lessons.
- Install a fence with a locking gate if you have a home pool.
- Watch children at all times when they are in or near bodies of water.
- Let them dive only in areas designated for diving, where the depth of the water is known.