Giving our kids the freedom they need

By Lenore Skenazy

Millions of moms and dads now see the world as so fraught with danger they cannot possibly let their children explore it. Many of us have been swept up in the impossible obsession of our era: total safety for our kids every second of the day.

All around us, because of the specter of fear, parents are restricting many aspects of their kids’ lives. Schools ban activities, parks ban games. Forty years ago, most U.S. children walked or biked to school. Today, only about 10 percent do. Seventy percent of moms say they played outside as children, but only 31 percent of their kids do.

Where did all this fear come from?

For one reason, we’re all working so hard we don’t know our neighbors. For another, the marketplace is brimming with products to keep children “safe” from things we never used to worry about. And just about everywhere we turn, we’re being exhorted through our media to watch out, take care and plan for worst-case scenarios.

Television plays a major role

From the news to dramas “ripped from the headlines,” TV is focused on the most horrific, least common crimes. We’re getting a skewed picture of what it’s like out there.

This started as far back as 1971 when rules changed and networks no longer had a strict code of conduct (in the early days of TV you couldn’t even say the word pregnant on the air). In 1981, cable TV began to provide a new kind of sensational tabloid journalism—all day, every day, on hundreds of channels.

The story of a young boy abducted in Florida gave rise to the milk-carton phenomenon that helped set the stage for our modern-day fear of kidnapping. Photos of missing children were printed on cartons, without clarifying whether the child was taken by a stranger (very rare), by a parent in a custody dispute (more likely), or had run away (also quite likely).

What it’s really like

Parents often say, “I’d love for my kids to have the same kind of childhood I had, but times have changed.”

Is this a rational argument? In some ways, times have not changed. According to the Department of Justice, the number of kids abducted by non-family members is small in comparison to the almost 800,000 reported missing each year—many are run-aways. In fact, all crimes against children have fallen since the early 1990s.
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But what if that child is yours? That’s the worry we all have. Again, the facts: a child is 40 times more likely to die as a passenger in a car accident than to be kidnapped or murdered by a stranger, 20 times more likely to drown than to be molested by someone he or she doesn’t know.

Plus, now that we are all carrying smartphones with cameras, suspicious behavior can be reported immediately to the police.

The free-range movement
By questioning whether it truly makes sense to do everything we can to protect our children from germs, jerks, sports injuries, sports disappointments, stress, sunburn, skinned shins and every other conceivable risk, I’ve become the face of what I call the “free-range movement.”

I believe that every child needs opportunities to roam, to fall, to fail and, finally, to fly.

Of course we need to teach our kids how to avoid danger. It makes sense to think ahead—and some activities truly are dangerous. It’s why you wear a life vest on a boat, a helmet on a bike. (And, if you’re my child reading this, you will never ever ride a motorcycle!)

What other people say
One factor makes it a lot harder for parents who would like to help their kids become more independent. And that is other parents. I call them the “shamers and blamers.”

They may mean well, but many of them don’t stop with just talk. They may even threaten to call the authorities. You probably heard about the parents in Maryland who were accused of neglect for letting their 10-year-old walk home alone from a local park.

Stories like this leave many of us unable to feel confident about our own instincts or to show our kids that we trust them.

All kids are different, as are all parents, of course. But if you would like to start weaning yourself from excess worry and give your kids more old-fashioned freedom, consider these suggestions.

Free-range baby steps
Cross the street with your school-age child without holding hands. Teach him or her to look around at the traffic.

When you’re all set to remind another parent of an extremely unlikely danger her or his child may face (a danger they’re as aware of as you are), just blush instead.

Volunteer to watch the other kids who are waiting with your child for soccer to start or school to open. Explain to the other parents that you’re offering them a little free time. If they say “no thanks,” you might ask them to watch your child.

Help a child from age nine and up to secure some kind of an “ap-

Free-range splashing is fun after being inside all day.

Talk to an older relative about some of the new baby-safety gadgets. Ask, “Which of these things did you need?”

Let your school-age child go into a public bathroom alone. Wait outside.

Teach your child that it’s okay to talk to a stranger sometimes. What’s never okay is to go off with a stranger.

Braver steps
Let young bikers, starting at age six or so, ride around a bit—beyond where you can see them (yes, wearing helmets, of course).

Muddle through a day without wipes, band-aids or extra cash. It will help you see that you don’t always have to be ready for the prenticeship.” If you can find a neighborhood organization or business willing to give a child a little responsibility, that’s fantastic. Or you might ask your middle schooler to do a task that you would normally do, such as taking the dog to the vet or buying some groceries for dinner.

One giant leap for kids
Drop off your third or fourth grader and a friend at an ice cream store with money for sundae$.

Give kids the tools they need to go free range. Teach them about bad guys, bike safety and traffic signals. Teach them how to ask for help and how to handle disappointment. Make sure they know what to do if they get lost—and all the other things parents have always had to teach their children. Or at least they did until recent years, when they apparently decided they could just do everything for their kids instead.

Do something that will truly make your child safer—and does not involve buying some dumb, new doodads. For example, test all of the smoke alarms in your home. Make sure they have working batteries. Change them twice a year when you change your clocks.

The next time you make a parenting decision that you are worried other mothers or fathers might find “lax,” get up the courage to tell them about it. Say you sent your young daughter out on an errand. They may be critical. Or they may be encouraged to do the same thing with their child.

Don’t be ashamed of making parenting choices based on your child, rather than on what the neighbors might say. There are always some people who will try to make you feel guilty.

If the fear of abduction still gnaws at you, do something to make the world truly safer. Volunteer to host a meeting about neighborhood safety at your home. Ask a local police officer to attend. Enroll your child or the whole family in a self-defense class.

Remind other parents that when we loosen our grip, we are actually trying to teach our kids how to get along in the world—which we believe is our job.

Independence is truly a cause for celebration. After all, children who can fend for themselves are a whole lot safer than kids who are coddled—because a coddled child will not always have Mom or Dad around in the future.

More tips for healthy travel abroad

A reader writes:

I enjoyed your Elder Care series on travel and shared it with my mother. Last year she and I went to East Africa together and it was the most exciting trip of our lives.

There are germs everywhere, of course, but when you travel to any country where the food, water and sanitation conditions are not what you’re used to, you run the risk of getting sick. So we did a lot of reading ahead of time on various precautions to consider. Here’s what worked for us.

We were careful about water. We brushed our teeth with water from a sealed bottled, never used ice, and kept our mouth shut when we took showers.

We chewed Pepto-Bismol tablets before every meal. We had read that this preventive measure was found to greatly reduce the risk of traveler’s diarrhea among Americans in Mexico. Mom asked her doctor about it, and he suggested a slightly larger dosage (two tablets instead of one).

We stuck to safe food. Some of the food from local vendors looked great, but we avoided it. We also avoided anything that was raw or undercooked. We stuck to food that was well cooked and served hot. We washed produce in bottled water and peeled it ourselves.

We washed our hands often. When soap and water were not available, we used a hand sanitizer with 60 percent alcohol content.

We used insect repellent. We packed plenty of sunscreen, insect repellent with 20 percent DEET and a first-aid kit that included hydrocortisone cream, an antibiotic ointment and some bandages.

We moved around on planes. We had read about the increased risk of blood clots during long flights. So we sat in aisle seats, got up at least once an hour and walked around for a couple of minutes. Mom also took the extra precaution of wearing compression socks.

Students benefit from school diversity

With changing demographics nationwide and the growing number of “gentrifiers” moving into cities, our public schools are becoming more racially and socioeconomically diverse. And that’s a good thing for kids, according to a new study from Teachers College (TC) at Columbia University in New York.

“Our findings show that diverse public schools can have a strong positive academic and social impact on all students,” say the TC authors in their report “A New Wave of School Integration,” just published by the Century Foundation.

The benefits of integration seem to flow in all directions—to middle-class as well as low-income students. The report cites a growing body of research showing that:

- Attending a racially diverse school is associated with smaller gaps in test scores among students from different backgrounds and higher scores for black and/or Hispanic students.
- Students of all races at integrated schools have higher SAT scores and are less likely to drop out than students in segregated schools.
- Racially diverse educational institutions help young people challenge stereotypes and biases toward people of different backgrounds. Biases can be harmful to those who hold them and to those who are targeted, causing both groups to be distracted from learning.
- Student satisfaction and self-confidence grow when teachers tap into the benefits of diverse classrooms by helping students challenge their assumptions and learn from more than one perspective.
- Learning in integrated settings can enhance students’ leadership skills.
- Integrating schools leads to more equitable access to resources such as facilities, good teachers, challenging courses, private and public funding and social and cultural capital.

The researchers suggest (a) redefining “good” schools to include measures of diversity and intergroup relations, (b) better preparing future teachers to work with students from different backgrounds, and (c) supporting parents and local leaders in gentrifying urban communities and diversifying suburban communities.

Apple iPhone’s parental controls do test better

When you hand kids a smartphone, you’re giving them a lot of power, says Caroline Knorr, parenting editor of Common Sense Media, which evaluates content and products for families.

With this in mind, Knorr tested the parental controls of Apple’s iPhone and Google’s Android for some common situations: preventing the viewing of adult content on a web browser, preventing a child from deleting apps on your phone, monitoring for vault apps, blocking costly app purchases, and preventing a child from burning through a cellular data plan.

Bottom line: the iPhone’s Family Sharing feature seems to work best, especially its Ask to Buy and Restrictions settings. But these childproofing solutions are still not enough, says Knorr. Parents need to talk with their kids about what’s right and wrong and help them earn privileges to use various phone features when they prove they understand.
Ways to reduce the risk of slips, trips and falls

More than half of people 65 and older will have some kind of fall this year. Among older Americans, falls are a leading cause of injuries and of more than 80 percent of hospital admissions.

The rate of fatal falls among older people has increased significantly in recent years. So this is an important issue for all of us with older friends and relatives.

“The most common fractures caused by falls involve the hip and the forearm,” says Frederick Frost, MD, a specialist in rehabilitation medicine at the Cleveland Clinic. “About half of the seniors who come into our hospital with a fractured hip are discharged to a nursing home or to the care of a relative. Either way, they lose their independence.”

Dr. Frost cites as risk factors a previous history of falling, poor eyesight, taking three or more medications, vertigo, light-headedness when standing up, the use of a cane or walker, limited neck flexibility, impaired alertness, lack of lower-limb coordination and foot problems.

Improving the odds

However, falls are not inevitable. There are many things older people can do to improve the odds of staying on their feet. Here are a few suggestions:

Exercise. Regular physical activity can improve lower body strength and balance. Helpful exercises include tai chi, yoga, Pilates, stretching and dance classes. University of Maryland kinesiologist Ben Hurley, PhD, says two months of weight-bearing exercise can reverse two decades of typical muscle loss and three decades of muscle strength deterioration. Focus especially on strengthening thigh and ankle muscles.

Manage chronic conditions. Low blood pressure, arthritis, Parkinson’s disease and other chronic illnesses can increase the risk of falling, and dizziness is a side effect of many medications. Encourage older relatives to talk to their doctors about any “fall-risk increasing” drugs they may be taking. A lower dose, different drug or reduction in total number of medications may be advised.

Check vision. When was your older relative’s last appointment with an eye doctor? The Canadian Institutes of Health Research found that people who waited six months or longer for cataract surgery were much more likely to suffer a fall than those who had their operation within six weeks of a diagnosis.

Minimize hazards. Most falls take place in and around the home, often in the bathroom. Because older people are so aware of this, many of them become even more sedentary, which increases their risk of falling. Help older relatives take preventive measures to avoid home falls. See the box below for specific tips.

Don’t skimp on protein. People who live alone tend to consume too little protein, and a low-protein diet weakens muscles. If you are 65 or older, your protein target in grams should be half your weight in pounds. So if you weigh 150, you should be eating 75 grams of protein a day. Good sources include meats and fish, beans and vegetables, cottage cheese and yogurt.

Get enough vitamin D. Be sure to get all the calcium and vitamin D you need. Strong bones can be a lifesaver in a fall. An Australian study found that a daily vitamin D supplement makes up for a seasonal reduction in your body’s natural levels of the “sunshine vitamin” and lowers the risk of winter falls by about 23 percent.

A fall prevention checklist

Our senses of touch, vision and inner ear balance decline as we age, so we’re more likely to slip and fall. Here’s a checklist for you and your older relative to help minimize the risk of falls in and around the home.

- Park close to the door and make sure there’s a clear, well-lit pathway to the door.
- If you enter your home through stairs, make sure handrails are steady and secure.
- All doors should be easy to open and wide enough to get through without straining.
- Paint the edges of outdoor steps and any steps that are narrow or uneven.
- Be sure all home seating is adequate, safe and easy to get in and out of.
- Be sure that all pathways and stairways are well-lit and clutter-free.
- Are light switches easy to reach and near the entrance to each room?
- Keep a phone nearby and be able to turn a TV off and on without getting up.
- Remove area rugs and wear non-slip, low-heeled shoes or slippers with grippers.
- Move items used most often to counters or shelves that are easily reachable.
- Don’t use a step stool or ladder. Ask for help if something is out of reach.
- Have a bedside lamp and phone that are easy to reach without getting out of bed. Put night lights in the bedroom and hallways.
- Install grab bars in the shower, tub and toilet areas, as needed.
- Use non-slip adhesive strips or bath mats with a strong suction grip.
- Have glowing light switches installed at the top and bottom of stairwells.
- If you feel dizzy, sit down and allow enough time for the dizziness to clear. Stand up slowly and hold onto something steady.
- Think about wearing an alarm that will bring help—in case you fall and can’t get up.

Lots of older people take tai chi classes to improve their balance.
Outdoor play helps kids build skills and confidence

By Angela J. Hanscom

In her famous article “The Overprotected Kid,” Hanna Rosin writes, “I mostly meet children who take it for granted that they’re always being watched.” Indeed, this is true. We live in an era of supervised playdates, organized activities and much less time spent playing outdoors.

This may not seem like a problem, but opportunities to explore and play on their own help kids build social skills, emotional security, independence and creativity. And with less time spent developing strength, coordination and balance, children are more accident prone and susceptible to harm.

Compared to 30 years ago, teachers are noticing less imaginative play. Kids don’t develop their own games as much. They seem to be losing their desire and their ability to play—something that’s fundamental to human nature.

Yes, school recess and after-school sports are good opportunities to get kids moving but, ideally, they should just be a supplement to free and active play.

**Defining free play**

“Free play is self-driven and self-directed,” says scientist and play expert Peter Gray. “You always have a choice of whether you want to play or not and you can quit when you want. There’s no such thing as ‘unstructured play’ because when children get together they form their own rules.”

Through play and risk taking, children learn about themselves: their interests, abilities and how to regulate their emotions. Kids test their limits physically and mentally, growing stronger each time they play. They develop a sense of confidence as they climb a tree a little higher or another child agrees to play with them when they ask.

Kids learn patience and how to persevere to keep a game going. Through free play, they become flexible, resilient and capable. Free play also lays the foundation for a working career and for long-term positive relationships as an adult.

**The fear factor**

Letting kids explore the outdoors on their own intimidates many adults, of course. Fear is often the biggest barrier to giving a child some wiggle room away from constant adult supervision.

Fear comes in many forms. We’re afraid of childhood abduction, of kids getting lost or hurt (see front page article). There are smaller fears as well such as bug bites, wild animals and poisonous plants. Getting children outside and active can be a challenge. Some neighborhood parks are inaccessible or poorly maintained. And there’s the competition of TV and electronics, too.

But too much protection can keep kids from getting the skills and sensory awareness they need to grow into resilient, able-bodied adults. Movement, through outdoor play especially, is the best gift we can give our kids to ensure healthy bodies, creative minds, academic success, emotional stability and strong social skills.

**Risk taking**

“Children have a sensory need to taste danger and excitement,” says Ellen Sandseter, a professor of early childhood education in Norway. Using a knife to whittle a stick, exploring without an adult and tending a fire all have one thing in common, risk of injury.

Although letting kids take risks can be scary, these experiences boost their confidence. For example, riding a two-wheeler for the first time teaches patience, perseverance and resilience.

**Learning new skills**

Left to their own devices, kids experiment with their surroundings, make mistakes and learn from them. They problem-solve, negotiate, imagine and investigate. And these are all important skills for the safe navigation of and interaction with the world around us.

Even simple activities can promote balance and body awareness: spinning in circles, rolling down a hill and climbing back up, dancing, gymnastics, skating, diving, crawling. Running on uneven terrain, jumping off small rocks and stomping in puddles can provide healthy weight-bearing opportunities to strengthen bones.

Here are some examples of family outdoor experiences that engage the senses:

**Fruit and berry picking.** Many farms offer seasonal pick-your-own edibles. Or you might buy some produce at a farmers markets, and make a pie or muffins together.

**Gardening with children.** This offers many sensory benefits. Kids get to dig in the dirt, use a watering can, nurture living plants, tolerate new textures and broaden their food horizons.

**Interacting with animals.** Caring for animals exposes kids to a lot of different textures, smells, sounds and sights as well as developing their caring instincts.

**Enjoying nature together.** Plan a vacation to a state or national park where every member of the family can recalibrate and rejuvenate in nature for a few days.

**Space to move**

Having the space to run and play can provide an opportunity for children to relax and move at their own pace. Here are some types of spaces to consider:

— a field of grass to run through
— an area for water play
— a dirt area to play in and get muddy if kids want to
— bike paths or walking trails
— hills to climb up or roll down
— wooded areas to explore
— large rock formations to climb

When a natural setting isn’t available, playgrounds and indoor play spaces like rock-climbing gyms and art or science tinkering labs, can also offer great experiences.

Look for places that stimulate but don’t overwhelm kids. Look for experiences that challenge them physically in different ways and foster creativity.


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Climbing trees can promote body awareness and confidence.
Does a handshake really matter? You bet it does.

By Barbara Pachter

Does it really matter if I shake hands? How firm should my handshake be? Should a man shake hands with a woman? A woman with another woman? Is it okay to shake hands sitting down?

These questions may seem unimportant but, in fact, your handshake can affect how people perceive you. If you want to be taken seriously, especially at the workplace, you need to shake hands—and do it correctly.

It’s a learned behavior

Talking about some of the young people with whom she works, one manager at one of my workshops commented, “They’ve been told to shake hands, so they stick their hands out but they don’t know what to do next.”

Many people have not been taught what to do, or what they learned no longer applies. For example, in today’s business world, a man no longer needs to wait for a woman to extend her hand. Unfortunately, many women were never taught to shake hands in the first place. As a result, some feel uncomfortable doing it, especially with other women.

When we discussed this at a recent seminar, a high-powered corporate lawyer confessed, “You’re right. I never thought about it. I have not taught my four-year-old daughter to shake hands, but I’ve already started teaching my son, and he’s only two.”

How to shake properly

Here are the guidelines for shaking hands in the United States:

- **When you enter a meeting and are introduced to its participants.**

  **Gender considerations**

  Here’s a scenario that seems to happen fairly often. Several men and one woman are meeting around a table. They are joined by a man who is a senior vice president of the organization. The men at the table stand up and shake hands with the VP. The woman does not, nor does she extend her hand. The vice president does not extend his hand to her either. Instead, the two of them nod.

  Both the vice president and the woman could be considered rude, and they both blundered. Women as well as men should stand up when they are shaking hands.

  While it’s true that the person of higher rank or the person acting as host should extend his or her hand first, this doesn’t always happen—because of misunderstood gender guidelines. Give the higher-ranking person or the host a second or two. If it becomes apparent that he or she is not going to extend a hand, go ahead and extend yours.

- **When to shake hands**

  - When you are introduced to someone and when you say good-bye.
  
  - When a client, customer or visitor from the outside enters your office or workspace.
  
  - When you see someone you haven’t seen in a while.

- **Say something when you shake hands.** Acknowledge the other person’s name. “It’s nice to meet you, Mr. Jones,” or “Hello, Mary” or “Good to see you again.”

- **Shake correctly.** Extend your hand at a right angle with your thumb pointed up. Touch thumb joint to thumb joint. Once you make contact, put your thumb down gently. Wrap your fingers around the other person’s palm. A couple of pumps is enough.

- **Apply firm pressure.** A handshake should be firm but not bone-breaking. If the other person hurts your hand, try not to tense up. It’s better to let your hand go limp so it can slide out. (Frequent hand-shakers may wish to forego wearing a ring on the right hand.)

**Keep your right hand free**

Here’s another tip for a large meeting or conference. Before you enter a room, move anything you may be holding from your right hand to your left. That way, you won’t fumble around when someone wants to shake your hand.

A word to the wise: Wear your name tag on your right shoulder. It will be easier for people to see it when you shake hands.

**International perspectives**

Of course, shaking hands is only one of the ways people in the world greet each other. Hugs and kisses are common in Latin America. People bow in Asia, particularly in Japan. So Americans need to understand that people who are used to other greetings may give a limp handshake when they are in the United States.

In countries where handshaking is the accepted greeting, how people shake hands can differ as well. In Germany, for example, the handshake is firm, with only one pump.

The standard rule of international etiquette is that visitors should adapt to the culture they are in. Consult a guidebook or online sources about the customs of any country you plan to visit.

The Internet makes it easy. Just search for the keyword “etiquette” along with the name of the country or region you’re interested in. You’ll find plenty of good information. A particularly helpful country-specific website is www.executiveplanet.com.

**Slow down**

Remember, too, that in many cultures, you need to establish a personal relationship before you can do business. Don’t be impatient with this “getting to know you” phase. It builds trust.

As you do this, just be aware of how much physical space you should give to another person. In some cultures, you will be closer than the average U.S. distance of about three feet. In others you will be farther away.

Use hand gestures cautiously. Meanings differ across cultures. Keep in mind also any religious taboos that may affect the appropriateness of a greeting.

---Adapted from the author’s book NewRules@Work:79 Etiquette Tips, Tools and Techniques to Get Ahead and Stay Ahead” (Prentice Hall).
What’s up with those ‘inner cleansing’ plans

It does seem like a smart thing to do: removing toxins in the body and kick-starting healthier habits through inner cleansing. If you spend much time online or reading lifestyle magazines, you may well think that the celebrities promoting expensive tonics, herbal supplements, special diets and fasts are really onto something.

Experts from the School of Public Health at the University of California, Berkeley looked into many detox plans—and say there’s no scientific evidence to support them. To make matters worse, some of the plans are unsafe for certain groups of people.

Here’s their Q&A primer on the subject:

**What are these toxins?** The term is used to refer to substances that are poisonous to humans in relatively low doses. But that definition has broadened to the point of being essentially meaningless. Now it can refer to caffeine, sugar, red meat, gluten, alcohol and environmental contaminants, with much of the lore focused on the colon and the need to “purge.”

The only medically accepted use of colon cleansing is to prepare for procedures such as a colonoscopy. Colonic irrigation can cause dehydration, diarrhea and impaired bowel function. The digestive system does a good job of cleansing itself and ridding the body of waste. The idea that “caked-on” toxins cling to the colon and impair one’s health is nonsense.

**Do our organs ‘detox’ us?** The human body is a highly effective machine when it comes to self-cleansing. The skin, airways and intestines act as barriers to most harmful substances. The liver is a primary processor and the kidney filter out unwanted compounds. Unless these organs are impaired, they cleanse themselves. There’s no evidence a special detox diet or fast can improve what your body is naturally programmed to do.

**Is weight loss the goal?** Severe calorie restriction that many detox plans encourage is a poor long-term solution. Much of the weight loss is from water, and those pounds tend to return when normal eating habits are resumed.

**What are the risks?** Prolonged fasts and extreme, restrictive eating plans can disrupt the balance of intestinal micro-organisms and lead to the overgrowth of less desirable types. They can be risky for pregnant women, children and people with a weakened immune system or chronic conditions such as heart or kidney disease.

**What’s the bottom line?** Detox plans and colon cleanses are at best unnecessary and at worst harmful. Eating a healthy diet, getting enough sleep, avoiding tobacco smoke, limiting alcohol and exercising regularly should keep your body’s cleansing systems working well.

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Adapted from the UC Berkeley Wellness Letter

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Lighter landing may keep most runners free of injury

Most runners get sidelined by injuries every year—for reasons both known and unknown. Now a new study published in "The British Journal of Sports Medicine" suggests that being light on your feet is the ticket to keeping most runners healthy.

Researchers at the Harvard Medical School and other universities looked at running injuries from a new angle: those rare long-time runners who’ve never been hurt. They focused specifically on “impact loading,” or “pounding,” which refers to the amount of force you create when you strike the ground.

One suggestion from the data is to consciously think about making “a soft landing,” says Irene Davis, PhD, the Harvard professor who led the study. Or you might want to try landing closer to the mid-foot or slightly increase your cadence (the number of steps you take per minute), a change that tends to reduce pounding from each stride. Another idea: imagine that you’re running over eggshells or as a water strider, moving gracefully and weightlessly across a pond.

**Correction on Vitamin D**

In our February issue, we quoted the Center for Science in the Public Interest that vitamin D2 (from vegetable sources) and D3 (from supplements or meat) are equal in potency. But recent research has found that D2 does not have the efficacy of D3. In addition, studies also suggest that the minimum daily requirement of vitamin D should be much higher for many people. So talk to your doctor about what’s the best RDA for you.

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Some yogurts masquerade as a health food

All yogurts are definitely not equal, according to the Cornucopia Institute. Some are merely “masquerading as a health food,” which makes checking the labels a must. Here’s what to look for:

**Sugar content.** Yogurt is naturally tangy, so a lot of sugar (at the high-fructose corn syrup variety) is often added to make it more palatable. When you see elaborate-sounding flavors (like Berry Blue Blast), that’s a sure sign it’s loaded with sugar and calories. Starting in 2017, the FDA will require companies to list added sugars separate from total sugars.

**Fruit flavored.** The terms “fruit on the bottom” or “strawberry flavored” is a good hint the yogurt contains little, if any, actual fruit.

**Sugar stand-ins.** Some yogurts contain artificial sweeteners or “natural” (but highly processed) sugar substitutes such as stevia or monk fruit.

**Adding it up.** Some yogurts have added ingredients such as inulin or carrageenan to boost thickness or add fiber. Large amounts of these additives can cause digestive or allergic reactions in some people.

**Greek lessons.** Don’t assume that Greek yogurts is necessarily a better choice. Many Greek products are just as sugary as non-Greek yogurts, and some are “Greek” in name only, since there are no federal regulations on how the product must be made.

**Low-fat and nonfat.** These yogurts are not necessarily lower in sugar.

**Bottom line.** Look for the shortest list of ingredients and add your own fruit.
Is parenting really so different these days?

I think I’m someone like you: a parent who is afraid of some things (bears, cars) and less afraid of others (subways, strangers), writes Lenore Skenazy in her book Free-Range Kids.

“The ground has not gotten harder under the jungle gym,” she says. “The bus stops have not crept further from home. Crime is actually lower than it was when we were growing up. So there is no reality-based reason that children today should be treated as more helpless and vulnerable than we were when we were young.”

In this important book, Skenazy encourages parents to let kids be kids. She’s all for helmets and car seats but insists that children don’t need a security detail every time they go out. Armed with stories, wisecracks and statistics, the author punctures myths about rampant kidnapping, marauding germs and poisoned Halloween candy. She looks at where these fears come from, which ones are baseless and why they are so hard to shake.

We parents have come to feel that childhood is more dangerous for our kids than it was for us. But there aren’t any more creeps now than when we were kids she tells us. In fact, children today are statistically as safe from violent crime as we parents were, growing up in the 1970s, ’80s and ’90s.

Our kids are also more competent than we may believe. But media-besieged parents feel they must take every possible precaution to avoid some extremely rare possibilities.

This is the perfect book for parents who want to break away from a pattern of acting out of fear for their child’s safety—parents who want to ease into becoming what Skenazy calls “free-range parents.”

For these people, the author provides nuggets of advice at the end of each chapter—starting with “Baby Steps,” moving to “Brave Steps” and then to “Giant Leaps” (see front page article).

Interspersed throughout the book are special “Real World” sections containing cogent and encouraging comments and advice from parents who talk about their experiences becoming “free rangers.”

Free-Range Kids: How to Raise Safe, Self-Reliant Children (Without Going Nuts with Worry) (Jossey-Bass paperback) is available in bookstores and online.