Warm sand, refreshing surf — a trip to the beach can be a true pleasure. A few precautions can keep your experience pleasant and your family safe:

**DO** prevent dehydration. Bring along water and replenish fluid by drinking repeatedly during your stay. Avoid caffeinated beverages and alcohol as they tend to be dehydrating.

**DON'T** swim if lifeguards are absent. Even people who are good pool swimmers can get into trouble in open water.

**DO** prevent sunburn. Block the rays naturally by using an umbrella, wide-brimmed hat and sunscreening clothes. Also remember to pack plenty of waterproof, UVA/UVB sunscreen (SPF 30 is preferred, but SPF 15 is better than no protection at all), and reapply after swimming or every two hours. Seek shade between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., and wear sunglasses with UV protection.

**DON'T** approach sea life. Stay away from jellyfish (alive or dead) and unfamiliar animals. Shuffle your feet when walking on the ocean floor to give stingrays a chance to get out of the way. Though shark attacks are quite rare, avoid swimming between dusk and dawn.

**DO** inquire about beach conditions. Check with local officials or access water quality information by state at [http://water.epa.gov/type/ocbe/beaches/wherelyoulive_state.cfm#nc](http://water.epa.gov/type/ocbe/beaches/wherelyoulive_state.cfm#nc). Water quality often deteriorates after a heavy rain, and poor water quality can cause stomach problems and ear infections. Also, learn what beach flags mean at [http://www.usla.org/resource/resmgr/lifeguard_library/flagwarningstandardsisfinal.pdf](http://www.usla.org/resource/resmgr/lifeguard_library/flagwarningstandardsisfinal.pdf).

Fad diets are popular because they can produce quick — though temporary — weight loss, but some of them can be hazardous to your health, especially those involving:

**FASTING/DETOX**

These are often starvation diets in disguise, and they can cause headaches, fatigue and stomach upset. If you consume little or no protein, your body starts breaking down muscle, resulting in a higher percentage of body fat. You can also lose electrolytes and risk life-threatening organ damage. This approach is different from the medically supervised liquid diets or very low-calorie diets sometimes used for severe obesity.

**SUPPLEMENTS/INJECTIONS**

The Food and Drug Administration has banned supplements containing potentially dangerous ingredients, has not approved HCG (injection or homeopathic) and ADHD medications for weight loss and has warned against substances such as aconite, bitter orange and country mallow.

**HIGH PROTEIN/LOW CARB**

High-protein, high-fat diets may increase your risk of heart disease and stress your kidneys, leading to kidney failure. Complex carbohydrates (whole grains and produce) promote good health and should be limited only if medically advised.

**ONE “MAGIC” INGREDIENT**

Lemon juice, cabbage and vinegar aren’t magical diet aids. The “grapefruit” diet can be especially harmful for people taking certain medications for depression, hypertension and cholesterol. Bottom line: Avoid methods that severely restrict other foods.

**GET THE REAL SKINNY**

Fad diets are often based on the above strategies. If a diet promises results too good to be true, just say “no” and focus on portion control, exercise and a healthy, balanced diet instead.

“It’s not how much we have but how much we enjoy that makes us happy.”

~ Charles Springer
Healthy Weekend SPLURGES

Weekends can be tricky for people who are watching their weight — eating out and having cocktails with friends are perfect opportunities to blow a diet. But some experts say that sensible splurges might make it easier to stick to a diet long-term. The key is to do it right.

Accept your splurge foods. Chances are that your desire for a favorite decadent food isn't going to change, so indulge occasionally and in controlled portions.

Plan ahead. Have a healthy breakfast with fiber-rich foods to prevent over-eating high-calorie foods later. Want dessert? Choose one at the start of your meal. It might make it easier to forgo the creamy chowder or bread basket.

Do some research. Look up the calorie content of your favorite treats, then see if a lower calorie item might do just as well. For example, a hot fudge sundae packs a calorie wallop, while a lighter dessert such as a small brownie with frozen yogurt might satisfy.

Share the fun. Split an entrée with a friend or wrap up half before you begin eating, and don’t feel compelled to clean your plate.

Watch the specialty coffees. Drink water or seltzer beverage, and remember that decked-out coffees can have more calories than dessert.

Savor the moment. Make the splurge worthwhile by having only what you love, then use all your senses to delight in each morsel — eat slowly and notice the texture, smell and mouth appeal.

THE ITCHY DAYS OF SUMMER

Summer brings sunny days — and sometimes uncomfortable skin conditions such as:

HEAT RASH, blisters or prickly red bumps that form in warm skin folds, where clothing causes friction or after exercise-induced sweating. It’s most common in babies, appearing on the upper torso and in the armpits and groin. Prevent heat rash by wearing breathable, light clothing, remaining in air-conditioned or shaded areas, and minimizing sweating.

SUN ALLERGY, itchy raised red patches of sun-exposed skin. The rash may also appear as white or yellow bumps on a background of red skin, hives, blisters, and split or chapped lips. Symptoms often disappear once the affected area is protected from the sun.

POISON IVY, an extremely itchy rash caused by contact with the plant’s oils. Symptoms may worsen during the first week and last up to three weeks — seek medical attention in severe cases.

SEABATHER’S ERUPTION, or “ocean itch” caused by touching the larvae of jellyfish and other marine life. If you get stung, take off contaminated swimwear (and wash and dry on hot setting), rinse with salt water and shower thoroughly.

SWIMMER’S RASH, due to certain parasites in freshwater snails and sometimes on waterfowl. During your swim, the parasites can burrow into skin and cause an itchy rash. Fortunately, parasites soon die and the discomfort disappears in a few days.

RELIEF IS AT HAND: Ice, antihistamines and over-the-counter anti-itch or cortisone creams can relieve discomfort while the rash clears.

MOBILE MEDIC

Smartphones can not only take photos and play your favorite tunes, they can help you manage your health through a variety of free and low-cost apps. Here’s how:

Follow your diet. Setting goals, recording your food intake soon after meals, and monitoring your progress will help you stay on track.

Boost your fitness. You can measure and record your heart rate, steps per day or calories burned, as well as create a custom workout with exercises and stretching routines.

Manage diabetes, hypertension or other conditions. Individuals using apps for diabetes have been able to improve their blood sugar control. You can even use your phone with an optional cuff to measure and track your blood pressure.

Educate yourself. Whether you want to learn about medications, illnesses or first-aid techniques, apps can help you locate the information quickly.

Reduce stress and improve sleep. There are programs that teach you deep breathing, and others that provide relaxing background music and sounds to promote sleep.

NEXT MONTH: Stress Watch

Smart moves for your personal wellness program are at www.personalbest.com/extras/july12tools.