



Advice From the Nanny State

By *Hannah Mead and Michael Jahr*

Summary

Rest assured that the cash-strapped state of Michigan has not neglected core functions! Multiple state Web sites tell you how to do everything from driving to eating to dressing.

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In a fast-paced world, life can be daunting. Fortunately, the state of Michigan has online advice for almost everything, from shopping to gardening and eating to driving. Sure, some of it may be obvious, nitpicky or bizarre, but just remember: The state knows what's best for you.

For instance, state government is concerned about your health. It offers shrewd advice on meal choices: Don't eat the guts, heads or bones of fish (Michigan Family Fish Consumption Guide). If you are trying to reduce your sugar intake, consume less sugar (Sweet Relief!). While state officials are rarely the model of restraint, they want you to practice self-denial: Eat dried fruit instead of candy, and eat un buttered bread (Sweet Relief!).

Turn grocery shopping into a workout by doing laps around the store (Dr. Wisdom's Tip of the Day). Michigan's surgeon general provides a free online exercise journal to help you stay motivated, and exhorts you to clap your hands if you're happy and you know it (Dr. Wisdom). Confusingly, you are urged to "Indulge every so often and don't feel guilty," but also to "set goals and stick to them" (Sweet Relief!).

Prevent the spread of germs by washing your hands (Living Healthy and Loving It), and coughing safely — there's even an instructional video on how to correctly cough into your sleeves (Stay Healthy This Flu Season!). Have you spilled mercury on your pet? Wash the unfortunate creature with shampoo containing selenium sulfide (Mercury Spills and Your Pet).

Some simple measures can help keep you and your family safe. Never leave small children alone in the bathtub (Safety First!) or unattended in a vehicle (Hot Weather and Vehicles can be a Deadly Combination for Kids). Do not respond to spam e-mails (Spam Reduction). Take your vehicle to a mechanic instead of trying to fix it yourself (Auto Repair Rights & Tips). If you are attacked, stay calm and continually evaluate your options as the assault progresses (Crime Prevention Tips).

Do not clench your teeth (Living Healthy and Loving It). Instead, "dance to the radio" and "take deep cleansing breaths throughout the day" (Living Healthy and Loving It). To maintain a beautiful yard, keep it watered and fertilized (Spring Gardening Tips for Bedding Plants) — but use less water and fertilizer to help the environment (Clean Air Lawn Care).

Michigan Web sites also provide countless pages of helpful tips on raising young ones. For instance, children occasionally spill when they eat



Don't worry! Nanny will follow you everywhere!

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(Child and Adult Care Food Program), and they have trouble sitting still for long periods of time (Why Play in Kindergarten?). To make meals more entertaining or educational, “Talk about how potatoes grow. Pass around a whole potato and have the children sing, to the tune of ‘Mary Had a Little Lamb, I’m a potato, brown and round, brown and round, brown and round ...” (Child and Adult Care Food Program). Speaking of education, your child just might have trouble at school if he or she can’t speak English, so the state offers parents of non-English speakers some advice — in English (What Do I Do if My Child Does Not Speak English?).

It’s also important to remember your offspring. When you take your child in the car, “Place something that you’ll need at your next stop — such as a purse, a lunch, gym bag or briefcase — on the floor of the backseat where the child is sitting. This simple act could help prevent you from accidentally forgetting a child” (Hot Weather and Vehicles).

While state government chronically overspends, it offers prolific advice on economizing at home. To cut utility bills, use your air conditioning sparingly. Close your curtains during the day, and use dehumidifiers and fans (Beat the Heat and \$ave). “If you must use air conditioning, set the room thermostat as high as possible. Believe it or not 78 degrees is often considered a comfortable indoor temperature.” (Beat the Heat and \$ave).

To conserve fuel, limit your vehicular excursions by running multiple errands at a time (20 Tips for Energy Efficient Driving). As much as you may enjoy a pointlessly long and jarring commute, officials recommend using a road that is the most direct and in the best shape (Energy Efficient Driving). If you do encounter a rough road, slow down (Tire Tips Fact Sheet). Drive below the speed limit, and keep your windows rolled up to reduce drag (“Energy Efficient Driving”). Also, to ensure you get the most for your money, track and calculate the mileage you get from each station’s fuel (Consumer Tips for Buying Gasoline).

A great way to save fuel is to carpool. However, be sure to create a pick-up and drop-off schedule, instead of randomly driving around town (Carpooling Tips).

Loose-fitting, lightweight clothing is apparently the best attire for hot weather (Extreme Heat Preparedness Tips). You should also “avoid strenuous work during the warmest part of the day” (Extreme Heat Preparedness Tips). If the power goes out on a cold day, wear a hat or try making a fire in the fireplace (Surviving Electrical Power Outages).

These are just some of the countless tips that state government has taken the time and expense to compile and publish. With the state facing a nearly \$2 billion budget overspending crisis, be assured that core government functions like these — and hundreds of others — continue unabated.

Now stop clenching your teeth.

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