[IMAGE]

School’s in Session – And So Is Back Pain

By Editorial Staff

Another school year means ... back pain? Yes, it’s true: Your kids are at risk for back pain during the school year. Here are a few of the primary reasons why they’re at risk and what you can do to help prevent it:

Problem #1: **Backpack (Mis)use**

Backpacks are a significant cause of back pain in children for several reasons. First, the average backpack is loaded with binders, books, lunch and all sorts of miscellaneous items. Add that up and strap it to your child’s back, and you’ve got a significant negative force – sometimes 25-30 percent or more of the child’s actual weight. Struggling to shoulder that heavy a load on a daily basis can lead to postural compensations (leaning forward, leaning back, etc.) and other issues that can lead to back pain.

What You Can Do: The American Chiropractic Association suggests backpack weight be no more than 5-10 percent of a child’s bodyweight. Weigh your child’s fully loaded backpack; if it’s above 15 percent, talk to them about how to reduce the weight. Does every textbook need to be brought to / from school every day? Are online versions available? Can copies be purchased / rented? Is a rolling backpack a better option?

Problem #2**: Sitting Around**

school kids - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark After 2-3 months of blissful leisure, kids return to the classroom essentially full time. Instead of running around outside all day, they’re confined to desks from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., depending on their age. Now consider the average school desk for a moment – not exactly a massage chair. More likely hard plastic or wood, with no real options for adjusting height or anything else. No wonder a recent study found nearly six in 10 schoolchildren ages 12-15 reported back pain in the previous year, with "remaining seated at school" a primary cause.

What You Can Do: Obviously you can’t do much about your child’s desk size / height at school, but you can certainly do something about it at home, which is where kids progressively spend more and more time doing homework and studying. Make sure your child’s desk is appropriate for their size in terms of height, space for their legs / thighs under the desk, and room to "operate" on the top of the desk. If they have a computer,

make sure the keyboard is positioned correctly so their shoulders don't slump / roll forward when typing. Also ensure that they aren't bending their neck up or down to look at the monitor. Finally, select a comfortable desk chair that can be adjusted, provides good support for their entire spine, and helps meet the above requirements regarding monitor and keyboard positioning.

Problem #3: Stress Levels

It's said summers are stress free, and your kids deserve it after a long, productive school year. But then school starts up again, which can increase the entire family's stress levels exponentially. As adults, we're much better (with exceptions) at handling stress than kids are, which means the school year can create significant angst for children. And what's a major contributor to back pain: stress!

What You Can Do: As parents, we can teach our children stress-reduction techniques and put them into practice throughout the school year. Adequate sleep is a must, as is a balanced diet. Scheduling their day, including homework and free time, is key to both keep kids on track with their schoolwork and also let them enjoy some moments of respite during what can be a hectic day. Encouraging them to communicate with you openly and honestly during times of stress builds the parent-child bond, and in terms of stress, it lets them release their frustrations, rather than keeping things bottled up. And the most important stress-reduction tip: Don't sweat the small stuff! If they're done with their homework for the day, let them enjoy their electronic devices / TV for awhile. It won't destroy them ... not like stress can.

Don't let back pain limit your child's potential. Talk to your chiropractor about these and other causes of back pain, and how you can limit your child's risk. After all, don't all children deserve a pain-free school year (and every day in between)?

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