

[IMAGE]

## Helping Teens Avoid Back Pain

Smoking can more than double an adolescent's risk of developing long-term low back pain, according to a recent study in the *American Journal of Epidemiology*. Previous research has linked chronic back pain in adults with an early onset and previous history of the problem, so preventing symptoms during the teenage years may reduce pain later.

Researchers investigated the influence of various risk factors on development of pain: high growth spurt; poor flexibility; poor abdominal strength; physical activity; work; mental health; and smoking. Five hundred and two high school students were studied over one year, and data were gathered from student questionnaires and physical measurements.

Overall, 17 percent of adolescents reported low back pain. A major growth spurt (more than two inches in six months) was the most noticeable risk factor - it tripled the odds of developing pain. But the other major contributors to developing pain were all preventable: smoking, working out, and poor flexibility in the major upper-leg muscles.

Education is a good first step to keep your teenagers from developing low back pain. Warn them about the risk factors for developing a problem, and the consequences they will face later in life. In addition, be sure they follow a few simple rules:

- Avoid smoking.
- Stretch leg muscles adequately, especially prior to working out.
- If weightlifting, be sure to follow proper techniques and don't overdo it.

### *Reference:*

Feldman DE, Shrier I, Rossignol M, et al. Risk factors for the development of low back pain in adolescence. *American Journal of Epidemiology* 2001; 154(1), pp. 30-36.

For more information on back pain, go to <http://www.chiroweb.com/find/tellmeabout/backpain.html>

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