

[IMAGE]

Oh, My Aching Backpack!

We're all familiar with the term "growing pains," right? Health care providers use this term to describe the aches and pains children experience in their joints and limbs as a result of rapid growth. Previous research has shown that up to 50 percent of all 15- and 16-year olds experience some sort of back pain, but can all of this be due to the growth process? A new study attributes the incidence of adolescent back pain not to growing pains, but something entirely different: backpacks.

In this study, 1,126 children between the ages of 12 and 18 were asked about their health, activities and backpack use. A child was classified as suffering from back pain if he or she met one or more of the following criteria in the preceding month: neck or back pain that interfered with school or leisure-time activities; pain in the back or neck with a severity rating of 2 or more (on a scale of 0 to 10); a visit to a physician or therapist for neck or back pain; or being exempted from physical education or sports because of neck or back pain.

Based on the above criteria, 74.4 percent of the children surveyed were classified as having back pain.

Among the key points:

- Adolescents with back pain displayed "significantly poorer" general health scores; performed fewer physical activities; and had more general bodily pain.
- Significant relationships drawn between the incidence of lower back pain and both the weight of the backpack and the amount of time the backpack was used. Some backpacks were inordinately heavy; 18.9 percent of the students carried backpacks that, when full weight more than 20 percent of the student's body weight.
- Females were more than twice as likely to experience back pain compared to males.
- Additionally, girls who carried a purse along with their backpack had significantly more back pain than girls who did not.

As the results of this study show, backpacks appear to be a leading contributor to back pain in adolescents. If you have a young child, check his or her backpack to ensure that it isn't too heavy. You may also want to consider buying your child a wheeled backpack, which can take a tremendous amount of stress off his or her back. And of course, regular visits to your local chiropractor can do a world of good, too!

Reference:

Sheir-Neiss G, Kruse R, Rahman T, et al. The association of backpack use and back pain in adolescents. *Spine*, May 1, 2003: Volume 28, Number 9, pp.922-930.

For more information on back pain (and ways to avoid it!), visit
www.chiroweb.com/find/tellmeabout/backpain.html.

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