

Teen Back Health.

Recent research suggests that children get back pain too and it appears that adolescents who experience back pain often take it with them into adulthood. Results vary but studies have found that between 13% and 50% of teenagers have already had episodes of back pain.

As our lifestyle becomes less physical, the effects on our health are becoming obvious. Obesity levels are increasing. A study in 2006 found that the heavier the child, the more likely they were to suffer from back pain. Worrying then that the Department of Health figures suggest that one in four children is overweight and the number classified as obese is doubling every ten years. Worrying too is the fact that children as young as two are being diagnosed as obese. And from a financial perspective, obesity already costs the health service €339 million per annum.

However, it's not all bad news. Research also suggests that healthy children make healthy adults. The HSE run campaigns giving our children information on good diet and dental hygiene as part of the school curriculum. So why don't our children learn how to look after their backs? It is after all, law for employees to learn about safer lifting in the work place. Why therefore are lessons on back care not mandatory in schools?

Our children are now spending more time on computers and games. They are less active and have larger frames than children 30 years ago. However the school furniture has not changed significantly in that time. Less locker space and more homework mean they must carry heavy bags to and from school. A 2003 survey of 1126 schoolchildren aged between 12 and 18 found that chronic low back pain was associated with the weight of their schoolbag. We know children need to bring schoolbooks to and from school, but how they are packed and carried are significant factors. Heavier items should be placed closer to the child's back and both straps of the backpack should be used when carrying it. If your child is leaning forward or arching his/her back to carry the bag, then it's too heavy for them. Check with your school to ensure they provide adequate locker space for schoolbooks during the day.

Workstations are also an important factor. There is little we can do about the desks our children sit at while in school. Let's face it – the Department of Education are not in a position to replace all the desks and chairs in our schools with ergonomically designed ones. In Scandinavia, most schools provide height adjustable tables with tilting desk tops. This encourages the child to sit and write and still maintain the natural S-curve of the spine. This is what we should aim for at home, particularly for students in their exam year, where it's hoped they will be spending more time than usual at their desks! A seat wedge on their chair also helps to maintain the S-curve. Regular breaks and stretching are vital. Get them to run up and down the stairs to get the heart pumping and the blood flowing.

And finally to the Playstation Generation! Along with the risk of back pain due to poor posture and an inactive lifestyle, there children also are at risk of straining their hands and wrists or developing RSI. In fact these cases are already being seen and are referred to as "Nintendonitis". Add texting and the computer keyboard into the mix and you have a recipe for disaster. It's sensible to set limits for playing these games. Suggest taking a break and getting some exercise outside. Perhaps give your child a gym ball to sit on when playing the Playstation. Have you ever tried to slouch on a gym ball? It's fairly difficult!

While research and health statistics may seem disheartening, it's worth remembering that a few small steps taken now will remove most of the risk for your child. They may not like your advice, but they will thank you in the end.

For more information on the benefits of Cranial Osteopathy please contact Frank Kelleher, Cranial Osteopath for Babies and Children at [Touchstone Osteopathy at Blackrock Hall Primary Care Centre](#). Tel; 021 4231166 or Email; frank.kelleher@blackrockhall.ie