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## Dangers of Back Pain at School

The new school year is well underway. Children are back in the classrooms, running around playgrounds and playing sports. However, children, like adults, can be prone to back pain, and there can be several causes. The most common causes of joint and back pain in school children are: Lack of exercise or excessive exercise Weight of school bags Bad posture Poorly set up desks Use of a computer or computer games Sports injuries Ill-fitting shoes/improper shoes Lack of exercise and excessive exercise The general finding from various studies is that children involved in competitive sports and those who are sedentary are more prone to getting low back pain while those that participated in moderate activity were protected. The children involved in competitive sports run the risk of getting repetitive strain injuries. Those children who are sedentary are often those who sit and watch a lot of television or play on a computer. The implication of this will be discussed below. Weight of school bags School bags are exceptionally heavy for those attending secondary school due to the number of different subjects covered and therefore the number of textbooks required and the fact the children often have to move between classes. Not all children have access to lockers, which mean that books have to be carried with them. Bags carried on one shoulder causes an asymmetry of the body and therefore certain muscles will

have to tighten and others lengthen in order to carry the bag. These kind of imbalances can cause long-term problems. Bad posture All aspects of life can induce bad posture; lack of exercise, weight of school bags, spending too much time playing computer games or on the computer, incorrect shoes, and growth. Those children who grow faster and become taller than their peers may slouch in order to not tower above their friends and this can ultimately lead to bad posture. Poorly set up desks Whether at school or home, ill fitting desks can lead to bad posture. School desks and chairs cannot cater for individual heights of children and, as mentioned earlier, the children often have to move between classes. The desks and chairs are uniform and unable to be altered to the child's individual needs. Guidance on correct desk set up should be implemented at home; not just for the kids but also for everyone in the family who uses the desk. At school this can't be done, but by advising the child to sit upright and not to slouch and not to cross the legs will help. Use of a computer or computer games Any body position requires certain muscles to shorten and others to lengthen. This occurs every time we move. If we were to stay in one position for too long those muscles will eventually stay that particular length. When children play on computer games it quite often requires time. This leads to the above situation with muscles. Children should be encouraged to not spend longer than 30-40 minutes at any one time playing games, using a computer, or even doing homework before having a break. The child should spend a few minutes walking around and then returning to the game/homework by reviewing their posture and sitting correctly. Sports injuries Those children who play a lot of sport and those who play contact sports such as rugby may be injured either by direct contact or by overuse of certain muscles. If a child is injured it is advisable that they are seen by a chiropractor as problems unresolved can lead to compensations, ie walking differently due to sprained ankle leading to low back pain, a rugby tackle causing neck pain and headaches. Ill-fitting shoes/improper shoes Children are conscious of fashion, which can affect their shoe wear. Girls particularly may wear shoes with a high heel. This causes the calf muscles to shorten and pushes the body forward. To prevent falling over the girl would have to lean back and causing an increase in the low back curvature which can not only cause low back pain but also pain between the shoulder blades. Wearing improperly fitting shoes can cause many problems from blisters, pressure sores and ingrowing toenails in the short-term, to feet deformities like hammer toe, and knee and posture problems in the long-term. It can take up to 18 years for feet to fully develop, so teenagers feet need to be looked after just as much as younger children's. Shoes should be the correct size and offer the right amount of support. When purchasing new shoes, get the child's feet correctly sized by the shop assistant and ensure that the shoes are the correct length as well as width. Here's some advice to help your child: Rucksacks should be worn across both shoulders and the straps adjusted so the bag is held close to the body. If a locker is available, encourage your child to use it and ensure they only take the books and equipment needed for that day. Check their shoes are correctly fitted, supported, relatively flat, and are not too worn. Encourage your child to enjoy regular exercise, such as swimming and cycling. Use of the computer, playing computer games and homework should be in blocks of no more than 30-40 minutes. Advise them to have a little walk before returning and again that they sit with their shoulders down and back (not slumped) and their legs are uncrossed. See a chiropractor if your child is experiencing pain or discomfort, or even just to get a check up.

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## Foods can help relieve pain

The primary factors that can cause or worsen pain include poor posture, injury, too little (or too much) activity, and specific conditions such as arthritis. However, what you eat can also help to manage or relieve pain, or even prevent it injury in the first place. Here are some of our top nutrition tips for managing pain.

**Ditch the processed foods** Processed foods generally refers to most things that come in a packet with a list of ingredients: from biscuits to ready meals to breakfast cereals. They often contain little in the way of naturally occurring vitamins and minerals. They may worsen inflammation and pain because they contain higher levels of unhealthy fats – in particular, processed omega-6 fats and ‘trans’ fats, which have pro-inflammatory properties. They often contain quickly absorbed sugars or refined carbohydrates too, which may exacerbate inflammation when consumed in excess. In contrast, ‘real’ foods are as close as possible to how they are found in nature. They can include whole vegetables and fruit, nuts and seeds, whole grains, fish, eggs and meat (whole cuts, not ‘deli’ or processed meats). These foods naturally contain higher levels of nutrients that can help reduce inflammation and pain, such as those we’re going to look at in more detail below.

**Eat magnesium-rich foods** One of the nutrients that may help to manage pain and inflammation is magnesium. Magnesium helps our muscles to work normally, including helping them to relax, which in turn helps to avoid or relieve muscle tension that can contribute to pain. This mineral is also important for the nerves. Magnesium is found primarily in whole unprocessed plant foods – especially green leafy vegetables such as spinach and kale, seeds and nuts, and whole grains including rye and buckwheat.

**Include oily fish** Oily fish such as mackerel, salmon, sardines, herring and anchovies are high in omega-3 fats. These fats have anti-inflammatory properties and therefore may help to manage pain. The specific omega-3s in fish (EPA and DHA) can be more beneficial than the types of omega-3 found in seeds such as flax seeds. Aim to eat a serving of oily fish around three times a week. These can include tinned sardines and salmon as long as they do not contain added vegetable oils (olive oil is fine). Note that ‘omega-3 fish fingers’ are not a good source of omega-3 fats – stick to the real thing!

**Get plenty of vitamin C** You may know vitamin C for its role in the

immune system. But in fact the primary role of vitamin C is in making collagen – a protein that forms the basic structure of most of the body’s tissues, including the bones, joints and muscles. If your body can’t make collagen properly, these tissues will lose strength and function, contributing to not only day-to-day pain but also potentially painful conditions such as arthritis and osteoporosis. Eating a variety of vegetables and fruit is the best way to get enough vitamin C. Although ‘five-a-day’ is the well-known recommendation, we should be aiming for at least seven portions a day, primarily of vegetables, in order to get good amounts of vitamin C and antioxidants. Some of the best sources of vitamin C include peppers, kale, broccoli, kiwi fruits, Brussels sprouts, watercress and red cabbage. If you can, get your veg and fruit from a local producer (e.g. a farmer’s market) as it can lose its vitamin C when it’s stored or transported for long periods of time. Include anti-inflammatory spices The spices ginger and turmeric in particular can have anti-inflammatory and pain-relieving properties. Use fresh ginger and powdered turmeric in your cooking whenever you can, make fresh ginger tea with a grated thumb-sized piece of ginger. If you have a good vegetable juicer you can even make fresh ginger juice to sip on – but watch out, it’s strong! Try avoiding nightshades The ‘nightshade’ or solanaceae vegetables may worsen inflammation and pain for some people. These are aubergines, tomatoes, potatoes (not sweet potatoes), and peppers – including chillis and all types of chilli powder (cayenne, paprika etc.). If you’ve implemented the other changes for at least three months and not noticed a significant improvement in your pain, then try eliminating the nightshade vegetables. Consider eliminating gluten Gluten is a protein that’s found primarily in wheat, barley and rye. The most severe reaction to gluten is coeliac disease, where the sufferer has to avoid gluten for the rest of their life. But some people who do not have coeliac disease may also react to gluten in a less severe way, which can contribute to inflammation in the body. If you’re cutting out gluten it can be best to work with a nutrition practitioner (e.g. a nutritional therapist) for support to make sure you’re not missing out on any nutrients. For further information or comments, please contact [at](#) [on](#) or email at

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# Learn To Breathe To Reduce Stress

Our modern ways of living mean that our every lifestyle puts us in an almost constant state of excitement, whether we have something to be genuinely thrilled about or not! This can cause emotional problems including irritability, anger, and depression along with physical symptoms like headaches and stomach aches. Luckily, simply learning to breathe using certain techniques can help you to alleviate these issues. Many people that I see are suffering from stress in some way or another, whether this is muscular tension or poor sleep, both of which can impact heavily on day to day life. Practicing focused breathing exercises can help you relax and relieve the tension you've built up during the day and, done before you go to sleep, can help you slip off more quickly into a better quality sleep. First, it is important to find a comfortable position for these breathing exercises. The most popular position for this is lying comfortably on your back, with a small pillow or book propping up your head, without straining your neck. If lying or sitting in an alternative position is more comfortable, this is fine too. The next step is to breathe using proper techniques. Ordinarily, throughout the day, you may tend to take small and shallow breaths. In contrast, breathing exercises involve taking deeper, fuller, longer breaths. A deep, relaxing breath should start in your stomach. If lying on your back, it can be helpful to place your hands on your stomach to feel it rise and fall with your breath. With deep breathing, your stomach, chest and collar bones may rise and expand, but your shoulders should remain still, without rising towards your ears. While doing this, it is important to focus on your breath. The point of breathing techniques such as this are to alleviate stress, not to give your mind the opportunity to dwell on stressful thoughts. Sometimes it can help to count each breath in and out, counting up to ten before beginning again. Alternatively, you might like to count each breath itself to ensure that you are breathing deeply. It is normal to count around 5-6 seconds in, hold for a few seconds, and exhale steadily. This is a great technique to practise in the evening and before bed. During stressful incidents, you may tend to breathe shallow and quickly. This is effectively what happens in the fight or flight response and in times of stress can lead to hyperventilating. Therefore, when experiencing a stressful situation, at work, in traffic or with another person, it can help you dramatically to take a few deep breaths from your stomach to help calm down. Many people spend most of the day sedentary, sat at desks, and breathing shallow breaths. Taking just a few minutes a day to focus on breathing will help both body and mind.

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