



## BACKS FOR THE FUTURE

### Will I get back pain?

You might think you won't get back pain until you're grown up. But changes in the way we live mean that children can be prone to back pain too. In fact, studies show that almost half of all secondary school pupils are likely to get back pain at some time! Problems can begin as early as primary school, so you are never too young to start taking good care of your back.

### What causes back pain?

Normal daily activities and certain habits can trigger back pain – either now, or in the future. The common causes of back pain in children are listed below:

- **Schoolbags** – especially when they are carried incorrectly, too heavy, or poorly designed
- **Posture** – too much slouching and slumping
- **Sitting** – for too long, or on the wrong furniture
- **Exercise** – not taking enough, or overdoing it using the wrong technique
- **Diet** – too much junk food can cause weight gain which places extra stress on the body
- **Growing up** – even growth spurts can cause temporary back problems!

### What is back pain like?

Back pain is no fun at all. Many people don't realise how much they use their backs for everyday activities until pain strikes. Back pain not only stops you from taking part in sporting activities; it can sometimes prevent even basic movements such as sitting, standing, bending and walking.

### How can I protect my back?

Luckily, back pain can usually be avoided. There are many things you can do to help yourself build a stronger back. Here are some tips on how to avoid back pain or if you have had it in the past, to prevent it coming back again...

#### Schoolbags

It's not only the weight of your backpack that can cause back pain – it's the style of bag and how you carry it that really counts!

- ✓ Look for a sturdy bag with padded straps and a waistbelt and wear it over both shoulders
- ✓ Pack your heaviest objects first. This will stop you from arching and take the weight off your shoulders
- ✓ Adjust straps so that your bag sits snugly against your entire back

#### School furniture

Secondary school students come in many shapes and sizes, but most of the desks and chairs in your classrooms do not!

- ✓ If you work at a flat table, rather than a sloping desk, you will need to try hard to keep a good posture. You can stop yourself slouching by imagining you have a string attached to the top of your head which is lifting you into a tall upright position
- ✓ Make the most of your chair. Pull it close to your desk and sit back in your seat
- ✓ Your body is not designed to sit still for too long. Try to stand up and stretch during lessons and make the most of break time by keeping active

#### Leisure time

Achieving a good level of fitness is one of the best things you can do for your back. But studies show that more and more children are shunning traditional after school activities, such as football or swimming, in favour of TV and game consoles. To ward off back pain,



physios recommend that children use their leisure time as a chance to focus on physical activity.

- ✓ Regular exercise will strengthen your spine
- ✓ Exercise also helps you develop stronger muscles. Strong tummy muscles make it much easier for you to keep a good posture
- ✓ Physical activity can also boost self-esteem. If you are confident and body aware, you are much more likely to stand tall and upright which will help protect your back
- ✓ What you eat is also important. A sensible, healthy diet will keep your weight in check and help you avoid putting unnecessary stress on your joints

### **Homework and use of computers**

If homework tests more than just your brain, it might be worth thinking about changing how and where you sit! Following the tips below should prevent back and neck pain setting in.

- ✓ If you use a PC, or a laptop, make sure your screen is at eye level. This will stop you craning your neck as you work. Your mouse/keyboard should also be within easy reach
- ✓ Sit on a supportive chair. Your feet should touch the ground or be on a footrest
- ✓ Take lots of short breaks. This will give your body a chance to loosen up and prevent stiffness

### **If pain strikes?**

- If you are suffering from back pain let your parents or guardians know. They will be able to arrange an appointment with your local GP who may recommend that you see a physiotherapist
- Gentle exercise and stretches can help reduce pain and stop it from coming back. A physiotherapist will be able to show you how to do the exercises properly and provide other helpful advice.
- Remember – prevention is better than cure, so keep this information handy for easy reference!

### **Where can I find a physiotherapist?**

There are over 40,000 chartered physiotherapists in the UK. Your doctor should be able to refer you to your local physiotherapist, or your parent/guardian might want to book an appointment with a private physio.

When choosing a physiotherapist, it is important to make sure that they have the following sets of initials after their name.

- MCSP (Member of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy)
- SRP (State Registered Physiotherapist)

### **For more information about physiotherapy, contact:**

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