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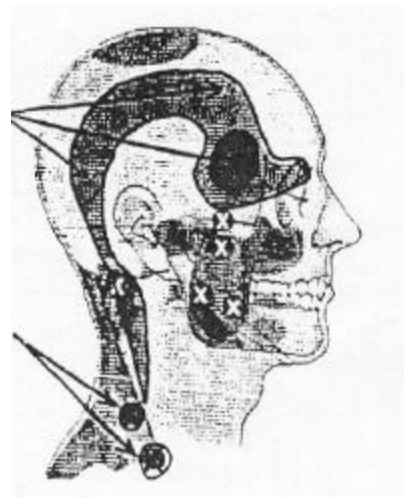
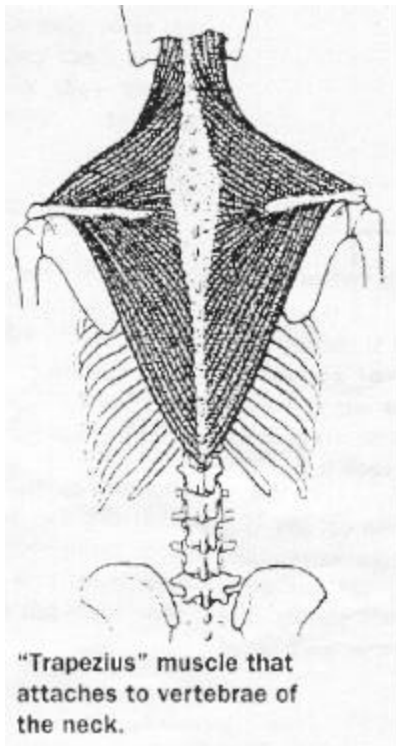
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"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

Packsacks: Fashion vs. Health

Everybody in today's society is very fashion conscious when it comes to what we wear. This is particularly obvious in the teenage years. They are greatly influenced by what everyone else their age is doing or wearing. Even the straight- forward packsack for school is a fashion statement.

This week, I will be talking to most of the grade nine and ten students at the high school about their packsacks or school bags. I will try to teach them that the most important thing about a school bag is how it is designed and how to wear it properly, rather than who the manufacturer is. Since this information will likely not reach the student's parents, I thought this weekly article might help me get the message out to them as well.



At some point of time, everyone has exercised too hard and for too long. Do you recall the burning sensation you felt in the muscles? When students carry their school bag improperly, it can cause problems. The muscles in the neck and shoulders are working too hard and “lactic acid” accumulates within the muscle tissue. This is just the waste product left over after the muscles use their energy to perform work. This is no different than when your car burns gasoline, it produces a waste product we call “exhaust”. This accumulated lactic acid cannot be flushed out fast enough by the blood and creates a burning sensation. The affected muscle groups will become generally sore and remain in a mild level of spasm. Small focal spots of muscle spasm can be found in the tight muscles and, when touched, they are quite painful. They are called “trigger points” and can send or refer pain to other nearby areas of the body. For example, a trigger point in the shoulder muscle (trapezius) can refer pain to the side or top of the head (see diagram). This particular one is often responsible for the common “tension headache”.

When your son or daughter is carrying that heavy bag on one shoulder, the muscles have to hold the entire weight. The force that the muscles are producing to carry that bag affects other areas of the neck as well. The muscles attach to the bones (vertebrae) in the neck. So, the harder the muscles have to pull to lift the bag, the greater the pull on the vertebrae. This is even more of a problem when only one shoulder is used to carry all the weight instead of sharing the weight over both shoulders evenly. In this situation, there will be a much greater pull on one side of the vertebrae compared to the other. This will restrict the mobility of the joints between the vertebrae of the neck. If this scenario occurs frequently and for long periods of time (everyday when they walk to school), the joints of the neck will inevitably become stiff and sore as well.

I see this problem nearly everyday in my practice. The high school students come in to see me for pain in their neck muscles and joints, usually accompanied by tension headaches. I try to explain to them that the heavy pack they just came in with has to be worn over both shoulders. I also tell them that if the pack has a strap that goes around their waist, use it. It will put the weight on their hips and off of the shoulders. If I see that their bag has only one long strap, I tell them that it should be worn so the strap crosses the chest. For example, if the strap is on the right shoulder, the bag should be on the left hip. Then, you can rotate the bag so it is resting mostly on the lower back and the strap is crossing the chest. This applies most of the pressure on the chest instead of the shoulder. When looking for a new packsack, choose one with wide padded shoulder and hip straps instead of narrow unpadded ones. If possible, avoid single strap bags. If the bag they are using is designed poorly, it will cause problems no matter how they wear it.

If your son or daughter is already experiencing pain or stiffness in the neck, or reoccurring tension headaches, check to see what type of school bag they are using and if they are wearing it properly. Chiropractors can address the

problems in the neck but if the aggravating factor is not eliminated, the problems will likely reoccur. If you have any further questions, contact your Chiropractor.