

# Dr. Colin Gage \* Dr. Duane Drobot

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Nicola Valley Chiropractic  
1949 Quilchena Ave.  
P.O. Box 909  
Merritt, BC  
V1K 1B8

Ph: (250) 378-5456  
Fax: (250) 378-8259  
Email: [info@merrittchiro.com](mailto:info@merrittchiro.com)  
Website: [www.merrittchiro.com](http://www.merrittchiro.com)

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

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## Packsacks for Your Kids

It is important for all parents to know that the improper wearing of backpacks full of books can cause problems with your child's neck, shoulders, and arms. It can even cause headaches. When their shoulder and neck muscles remain contracted for prolonged periods of time, the muscles will get tired and ache. When any muscle is working hard, the tissues produce Lactic acid and waste products. Just like when your car is running, it produces waste products we commonly call exhaust. This collects in the muscles. If your child doesn't give the muscles time to relax and let the blood flush out the waste products, the muscles will become very tight and sore.

Once the shoulder and neck muscles are tight, small focal spots of spasm called "trigger points" can be found in the muscle tissue. They are quite painful when pushed on lightly. They can also refer or send pain to other areas, such as the side, top, and front of the head. This causes chronic dull headaches that most people incorrectly believe comes from their sinuses. When the neck is stiff and the headaches are bad, the students can't concentrate in class well and usually don't sleep well at night.

The same tight muscles all attach to the back of the bones in the neck (vertebrae). Between each of the seven vertebrae, there are two small joints. When the muscles are pulling on the vertebrae, the potential movement of the joints is drastically reduced. This is particularly true when the muscles are pulling more on one side. For any joint in your body to stay healthy, whether it is your knee, neck, or finger, it must have good movement and get used each day. When any joint does not have good mobility, it will become stiff and sore. This leads to a potentially sore neck.

If you want to do your part in avoiding potential pain and suffering in your child, try to be sure that your child has a properly designed pack and encourage them to wear it correctly. If your kids are using a packsack, make sure they use

both the shoulder straps and not just one. If they only use the one strap, they will have to lift or elevate the shoulder to prevent the strap from sliding off. They will be overworking the muscles we talked about and this will eventually strain the neck and shoulder as I mentioned. If their packsack has a strap that goes around the waist, you have to be sure they use it. This is especially if they are walking or standing for a long time –like when they walk to school.

If you they have a bag with just one strap, they should wear it on the right shoulder when the bag is on the left side of their body – or vice versa. Then turn the bag so it is sitting against their back. This will put most of the pressure from the strap on their chest instead of their neck and shoulder. Be sure this bag is not filled too full. It will never be as good as a two-strap packsack.

If you are planning on purchasing a packsack in the near future, there are some things you should look for:

- make sure it has thicker and padded straps on the shoulders.
- it should definitely have a waist strap, wider and padded, that has an easy to use clip on the front. If its not easy to use, they won't use it.
- it must be big enough to be able to carry enough books to be useful.
- avoid single strap bags.