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

Reduce the Risk at School

Each day when we send our children off to school, we hope that they'll learn well from their teachers, make new friends, and select healthy foods in the cafeteria. But, most Canadians are not considering a variety of hidden risk factors our kids face every day in their school environment.

A troubling new study published in the medical journal "Spine" reveals an urgent need for health promotion programs to increase awareness and reduce risks in the school environment, such as heavy backpacks, desks and chairs that don't fit their users, and an absence of physical activity during recess.

As parents, we should be urging school administrators, teachers, and parents' organizations to more closely examine these unexpected hazards lurking in our schools. Specifically, parents and schools should become more aware of the risks associated with heavy backpacks, improper computer ergonomics, and a lack of physical activity. For example:

Backpack Safety

Young children are suffering from back pain much earlier than previous generations, and the use of overweight backpacks is a contributing factor. Here are a few tips to help prevent the needless pain that backpack misuse could cause the students in your household:

- Make sure your child's backpack weighs no more than 10 percent of his or her bodyweight. A heavier backpack will cause your child to bend forward in an attempt to support the weight on his or her back, rather than on the shoulders.
- A backpack should never hang more than four inches below the waistline. A backpack that hangs too low increases the weight on the shoulders, causing your child to lean forward when walking.
- Urge your child to wear both shoulder straps. Lugging a backpack around by one strap can cause a disproportionate shift of weight to one side, leading to neck and muscle spasms, as well as low-back pain.
- The shoulder straps should be adjustable so the backpack can be fitted to your child's body. Straps that are too loose can cause the backpack to dangle uncomfortably and cause spinal stiffness and pain.

Computer Ergonomics

In today's society, almost all of elementary school students use computers. As a result, many children are already suffering from chronic pain in the hands, back, neck and shoulders, as well as repetitive motion injuries (RMI) such as carpal tunnel syndrome. Make note of the following suggestions to help reduce the possibility of your child suffering painful and possibly disabling injuries:

- Make sure the your child's workstation chair fits him or her correctly. There should be two inches between the front edge of the seat and his or her knees. The chair should also have arm supports so that elbows rest within a 70- to 135-degree angle to the computer keyboard.
- Your child's knees should be positioned at an approximate 90- to 120-degree angle. To accomplish this, feet can be placed on a footrest, box, stool or similar object.
- Limit your child's time at the computer and make sure he or she takes periodic breaks during computing time.

Physical Activity & Nutrition

Childhood obesity has reached its highest level in 30 years. Contributing to this trend is the fact that children are exercising less and eating less healthy foods than ever before. Combat this growing problem with the following:

- Because physical inactivity is a risk factor for obesity, children should participate in at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day.
- Make sure your kids are getting plenty of rest. Eight hours of sleep is ideal for children. Sluggishness, irritability and loss of interest in school or physical activity could indicate that your child is fatigued.
- Avoid serving your child carbonated soft drinks. Instead, children should try to drink five to eight 8-ounce glasses of water each day.
- Make sure your child is eating a well-balanced diet and does not skip meals. Avoid providing high-fat foods, such as candy bars and fast food. At home, offer fruit rather than cookies, and vegetables instead of potato chips.

Chiropractic Care Can Help

If your child complains of pain and strain from sitting at a computer or from wearing a heavy backpack, see a doctor of chiropractic. A doctor of chiropractic can help alleviate your child's pain and help prevent future injury. A doctor of chiropractic can also offer advice on lifestyle changes to keep your little one fit and healthy.