

Dr. Colin Gage

Nicola Valley Chiropractic
2076A Granite Ave.
P.O. Box 909
Merritt, BC
V1K 1B8

Ph: (250) 378-5456
Fax: (250) 378-8259
Email: info@merrittchiro.com
Website: www.merrittchiro.com

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Study Links Back Pain to Backpacks

While the debate wages on regarding the impact of backpacks on school children, a recent study by the University of California Riverside determined that backpacks could in fact cause long-term pain for children who wear them.

According to the study published in the "Journal of Pediatric Orthopedics", the backpacks could be causing permanent back problems for the students. This is truly alarming. Research has shown that adults with severe back problems often had pain as kids. You can suffer all your life from this kind of injury," said lead author Dr. David Siambaes.

Nearly 3,500 middle school students, ages 11 through 15, were reviewed for the study. The research, funded by the Children's Spine Foundation, involved weighing the students and their backpacks, questioning the students on how they used their backpacks and inquiring about any pain the children had. Sixty-four percent of the children reported pain; 21 percent of the children reported that the pain lasted for longer than six months. Nearly all of the students said that they were relieved when they were able to remove their backpacks. Over 40 percent of the students in the survey walked to school wearing their backpacks.

Additionally, as the ratio of backpack-to-child's weight increased, so did the reports of pain, but since the increase was gradual, researchers were unable to offer a safe backpack-to-child weight ratio. The researchers did indicate, however, that a child who carried a backpack weighing only five percent of his or her body weight was less likely to report pain than a child carrying a pack that weighed 20 percent of his or her body weight.

While the researchers determined that backpacks could cause back pain and possible long-term injury, they also found that the pain existed regardless of how the backpack was worn. However, It is my opinion that the stress on a child's neck and back is distributed better if both shoulder straps are worn instead of just one.

If your child is experiencing even mild back or neck pain, due to his or her backpack or not, it is in their best interest to have that problem addressed by a chiropractor sooner rather than later.