



British
Chiropractic
Association

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Children warned 'Watch Your Back' at School

Statistics reveal 11 year olds are at risk of long-term back injury

With the new school term about to start, research carried out by the **British Chiropractic Association (BCA)** in conjunction with **Bolton Metropolitan Council**, has highlighted the risks that school children are under. From the bag and shoes they choose, to the amount of TV they watch, young people are constantly putting strain on their posture.

Results of the study¹ conducted by the BCA among Year 7 pupils found that, on average, **11 year olds spend a day and a half per week watching TV and playing computer games.** The British Chiropractic Association is concerned that this sedentary lifestyle is putting them at risk of developing back pain later in life.

The survey revealed:

- School children are spending huge amounts of time in sedentary positions watching TV or playing computer games. Boys were by far, the worst offenders, spending 21 hours 40 minutes, on average per week on PC/games console. Girls preferred TV, spending an average of 21 hours, per week in front of the box. And, spending long periods of time sitting can put twice as much pressure on the spine as standing.
- Over a quarter of kids lie down to watch TV or play console games – according to the BCA laying on your tummy with your head tilted back can load the small joints in the neck and lower back leading to irritation and pain.
- Types of school bags vary, whilst 44% were opting for the best option of a rucksack, children would only seek benefits if the bag was worn with both straps on and adjusted so that it fits snugly, so as not put stress on the spine. Unsurprisingly, results show that children's choices were more based on fashion not comfort.
- Of the children interviewed only 13% walk to school, most travel by bus or combine this with a short walk.
- Text messaging injury is a growing risk with school kids owning mobile phones from a young age so communicating by text is normal. 70% send between one and ten messages a day, whilst 15% sent in excess of ten.

The results highlight the risks school children are under, and the BCA suggest that long-term back pain really can begin this early on in life, but be minimised by correcting bad habits. 'Watch Your Back' is an initiative in the UK, originally launched by the BCA and Bolton Metropolitan Council, to target schools with a view to preventing back problems.

¹ Survey conducted amongst Year 7 pupils at St Joseph's RC High School & Sports College, Bolton

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Tim Hutchful, BCA Chiropractor, says: “The survey illustrates the sedentary lifestyle that children in the UK are leading. Children are especially vulnerable as their bones are ‘soft’ and still developing. Even something as simple as a child using two straps on his rucksack, rather than one, can make all the difference between a healthy back and dangerously bad posture (BCA).”

So far the ‘Watch Your Back’ initiative has seen a BCA chiropractor visit schools in the Bolton area, offering practical advice on children’s posture, school bags, exercise, and using computers. A leaflet and a video have been produced to illustrate the importance of looking after the spine aimed at year 6 pupils starting secondary school in September.

Hutchful continues: “We applaud Bolton in their commitment to raising awareness of back pain and hope that other Borough Councils will follow suit.”

The BCA makes the following recommendations for school children:

- ✘ **Bag it up** - if your child has to carry a bag to school – make sure you offer advice as to the type of bag they choose. A rucksack is the best option as long as it is carried over both shoulders, and the straps are adjusted so that the bag is held close to the back and weight is evenly distributed.
- ✘ **Keep it light** – make sure your child is not carrying any unnecessary excess weight - check that all the items in their bags are essential
- ✘ **Best Foot Forward** - Make sure your child has good footwear; soft-soled shoes that are supportive and have a good grip will make it easier for them to carry a heavy school bag
- ✘ **Exercise** – lack of exercise is your child’s worst enemy. Encourage your child to take regular exercise as the fitter your child is the less likely they are to injure themselves.
- ✘ **Move around** – Staying still for a long time is bad for your spine. Limit your child to small sittings of no more than 40 minutes on the computer or watching TV, before they get up and do something else for a while
- ✘ **Computer posture**– when using a PC or a computer console - make sure they are set up so they are sitting comfortably and their spine is supported. They may not realise that the position they are sitting in is painful because they are being distracted by the games!
- ✘ **Pain is a warning sign do not ignore it** – if you are worried about your child’s posture, visit a BCA chiropractor

Further information about BCA chiropractic treatment can be obtained by logging onto www.chiropractic-uk.co.uk For further information contact the British Chiropractic Association on 0118 950 5950.

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‘Watch Your Back’ leaflet produced in association with Backcare – the Charity for Healthier Backs. Visit www.backcare.org.uk for more details