

# BAGS OF TROUBLE



As far as carrying a school bag is concerned, what is trendy, cool and hip, dictates the style of bag a child or young person will carry. Some sort of bag is necessary, in order for children to transport text books etc, to and fro, throughout the school day. Are we aware of the damage being done to the spines of these young people, in so doing? One would think that young people, being so active and always on the go, would have very few, spinal related problems. As with everything, it is the seemingly insignificant things in life that can have the greatest impact, in the long term. Something as simple as the way your child carries their school bag and other equipment can have quite dramatic repercussions in later life.



**THE EVIDENCE.** A 1999 Italian study showed that more than a third of pupils aged between 11 and 12 were carrying school bags weighing more than 30% of their own body weight, at least once a week, some, as much as 16.3kg, which is nearly half their body weight! The researchers involved said, "guidelines for the weight of school bags should be drawn in an attempt to reduce increasing levels of low back pain, in Italian children". The report continued, "the evidence of back pain in children was approaching the levels noted in adults." Although the economic importance for this age group is relatively small, unlike the adult population, where work days lost through back pain is extremely high, not having certified limits for the weight that children, by necessity have to carry, is criminal.

A New Zealand study, of 140 Auckland secondary school pupils, found that 72.9% of the teenagers, reported ongoing back pain, due to carrying weights more than twice the industrial levels recommended for adults. Students were carrying an average total load of 6.6kg. A shortage of secure locker space, and lack of thought and imagination devising timetables, resulted in these students having to carry all their books and other needs with them for the entire day. It was found that 44% of them reported neck pain, 58% shoulder pain, 35% upper back pain and 35% were experiencing twinges in their lower back. It begs the question, is it any wonder? The 'British Chiropractic Association' conducted a study, which found that almost a third of British children experience back problems before the age of 8 years-IMAGINE! The suggested causes were unnecessarily heavy school bags, and a lifestyle lacking in regular exercise.



Single strap bag causes spinal deviation



Two-strap bag distributes load evenly

**WHAT TO DO.** Interestingly, a landmark study conducted a few years ago, at 'Michigan University,' into the rising trend of back pain in young people, concluded, weight gain and inactivity was the main cause. However, most experts concede this cannot be the only reason. Other factors must come into play; one of the culprits is - *carrying heavy school bags*. In one study, the British Chiropractic Association declared that, 61% of children do not have school lockers. This would imply that by the time a child has packed their PE kit, textbooks, and packed-lunch and more, the weight of their bag becomes close to 40lb (18kg). This would then naturally be carried around all day. Tim Hutchful from the British Chiropractic Association likens this to a grown man strapping a microwave oven full of food to his back for a whole day. Sammy Margo, a spokesperson for the 'Chartered Society of Physiotherapy', stresses the importance of, 'back friendly' bags. He dismisses the shoulder bags favoured by fashion conscious schoolgirls, as they, with only one strap, spread the weight in an uneven fashion. Instead, look for a bag with two wide, padded straps and a waist belt, this will distribute the weight evenly between the back, shoulders and pelvis, helping to reduce pressure on these areas and underneath the arms. Keep the load between 10 and 15 % of the child's own weight,



pack the heaviest items first and closest to the spine. Modern, plastic, school furniture is another cause for concern. Old fashioned they may be, but wooden, sloping desks, are much kinder to backs. If your child spends several hours at the home computer, do ensure that you have a good, adjustable chair that fully supports the lower and upper back. It is important for children, indeed for us all, to take a break from sitting too long at desks, computers or work-stations. If one is beginning to slouch or hunch over at the desk etc, take time-out to stretch, move about and generally have a break. The long term consequences of not looking after our skeletal frame can be dire.

## Poor Posture can result in: -

- : Neck, jaw, arm & low back pain
- : Headaches
- : Shallow breathing
- : Stretched nerves & spinal cord tension
- : Increased tension to ligaments
- : Lethargy & tiredness
- : Reduced height
- : Poor metabolism
- : Weight gain
- : Cardiovascular problems

## FREE SCHOOL BAG & POSTURE REVIEW

I would personally like to invite You to Creative Chiropractic for a FREE 30-minute School-Bag & Posture Assessment

- Open to children of all ages and their parents
- An opportunity to discuss the school bag design, the load carried and any posture and pain related problems
- An additional full, medical history will be taken to assist in identifying the root cause of conditions plus a full body posture assessment
- Absolutely no further commitment or obligation
- All discussion is totally confidential

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**TO SUMMARISE:** As you can see, something as simple as carrying a weighty, school bag incorrectly, can have dramatic consequences. If you have any concerns, do give the practice a call and please take advantage of the **FREE VOUCHER** attached. We also offer interactive educational talks to schools, teachers, children and /or parents, totally free of charge.

I will end on a lighter note. LADIES! What is in that handbag?!

*Michael T'Anson Doctor of Chiropractic*