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Information for parents and children

Your healthy back



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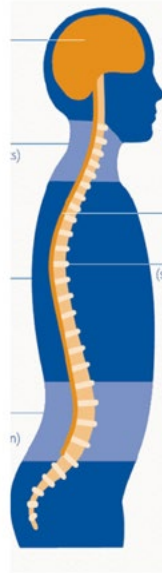
Back care for young people

Children, like adults, can suffer from back pain. The spine is designed to perform many functions.

It must be flexible to allow us to bend and twist and also strong so we can walk, run, carry, and lift.

Not all backs are the same shape. They are normally curved in a gentle s-shape. This s-shape needs to be maintained.

The muscles surrounding our spine are very important. There are three layers of back and tummy muscles. The deep muscles are often called the 'core' muscles. They help keep our spine strong and stable. When these muscles are weak, our spines are at more at risk of injury and pain.



Remember: prevention is better than a cure Fit for the future

- Try to get involved in a fun sport or activity you enjoy. Exercise promotes strong healthy bones and muscles which are needed to maintain a healthy back.
- Young people should be physically active for at least one hour every day. This can be broken into smaller sessions of physical activity throughout the day.
- Remember your five-a-day! Healthy eating is important, as not eating the right foods and being overweight places greater stress and strain on the joints of the back, hips, and knees.

If you have back pain:

- keep moving! Gentle exercise and stretches as advised by a physiotherapist will help to reduce pain and stop it coming back.
- a hot water bottle or ice pack may help to give relief.
- pain relief recommended by your GP or pharmacist can help in the short term. Do not exceed the stated dose.

This leaflet is aimed at adolescents.

If a younger child experiences backache you are advised to consult a GP as soon as possible.

When doing homework and using a computer:

- sit on a supportive chair
- keep your feet on the ground, hips slightly higher than knees
- the top of the computer screen should be at eye level
- the keyboard or laptop should be at elbow height
- keep the mouse close to your body.
- keep your shoulders relaxed
- remember to take regular short breaks away from the computer/ desk e.g. five mins in every 30 mins of constant computer use
- minimise time spent sitting down



Tablet, phone, and games console use

- Soft furniture, such as a sofa, moulds to the body but offers little support to maintain a good posture. Change position regularly and take regular breaks from your device.
- If your arms are too low when using a tablet or phone it forces you to bend your neck further to see the screen. Put a cushion or two on your lap to support your arms and keep the device in a higher position to help prevent neck pain.
- Some games require lots of repetitive movements. For example, serving a virtual tennis ball with the arm, or rapid shooting with the thumb. It is usually better to change activities regularly and use different parts/actions of the body.



Schoolbags

- Choose a backpack with padded adjustable shoulder straps
- Wear your bag over both shoulders
- Buy the correct size schoolbag. No larger than your back!
- Only carry what you need. If you are lucky enough to have a locker at school... use it!
- Pack your bag correctly, putting the heavy objects in first and on the inside, so they are close to your spine. This will prevent your back arching too much.



Posture

Good posture means trying to maintain the natural s-shaped curve of your spine.

A good way to achieve this is to imagine a helium balloon on a piece of string attached to the top of your head. Imagine the balloon pulling your body gently into an upright posture.

- Sit upright in your chair.
- Place your hands on your hips.
- Imagine that your pelvis is a bucket full of water.
- If you tip your bucket forwards, water will trickle out the front.
- If you tip your bucket backwards, water will trickle out the back. Try to keep your bucket exactly level so that water would not trickle out.

