

# 21st Century lifestyle crippling our kids



**Encourage all children to use devices wisely; either prop up the device so that it is at eye-level, or have the child lie on their stomach with the device in their hands in front of them.**

*Health practitioners of many disciplines are increasingly concerned that the 21st Century lifestyle is crippling the next generation.*

A major presented at the 2019 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS), shows a significant increase in back pain, specifically lower back pain, among children and adolescents between ages 10 and 18 years old. The increase progresses linearly with age by about four percent for each year of age.

New Zealand Chiropractors' Association (NZCA) spokesperson and chiropractor, Dr Cassandra Fairest, says: "Overladen backpacks, a lack of active play, hours spent hunched over electronic devices, and poorly designed and unsupportive beds are setting our children up for a lifetime of pain and dysfunction. The physical manifestation of these issues is just the tip of the iceberg; many other issues are likely to appear over time, such as a lack of confidence, anxiety, hormone imbalance as well as postural imbalances – to name a few."

The Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons' meeting was told that 33.7 percent of study participants had experienced back pain in the previous year, yet fewer than half (40.9 percent) had any form of healthcare to correct underlying issues. Of those who did seek healthcare, just over a third sought chiropractic care (34 percent).

Earlier this year new guidelines from the World Health Organisation (WHO) on physical activity, sedentary behaviour and sleep for children under five years of age advised caregivers to encourage children to engage in more active play.

Dr Fairest says: "When a child wears an ill-positioned, poorly-fitted backpack, it puts them at risk for long-term spinal and postural issues, which can lead to other life-long problems. A backpack should weigh no more than 5-10% of a child's weight.

"We know that many young people spend more than four hours a day reading or texting on their smartphones and when they're hunched over their phones, the effect of the head's weight can reach up to approx 25 kgs, which may lead to dysfunction in the joints of the neck and/or early

degeneration and herniated discs. On top of this they will be sitting at a computer doing homework. Health of the spine also impacts the nervous system, and the follow on to problems such as these are only starting to be recognised, with learning difficulties and social anxiety becoming more common.”

The NZCA wants to encourage kids to do regular exercises to minimise the effects of lifestyle choices on their spines. Regular chiropractic check ups help support proper spine and nervous system integrity, and simple devices such as a foam roller, mobility ball or neck wedge can help to stretch overworked muscles and improve posture.

Dr Cassandra Fairest, says: “The best posture is your next posture. We should be regularly moving rather than remaining primarily sedentary. Good, healthy posture is learned at a young age through physical activity. If healthy physical activity, non-sedentary behaviour and good sleep habits are established early in life, this helps shape habits through childhood, adolescence and into adulthood. We have developed a simple, three-minute daily exercise regime to support good posture and spinal health on our Straighten Up NZ website: <https://www.straightenup.org.nz/>”

#### **How to avoid poor posture:**

- Encourage all children to use devices wisely; either prop up the device so that it is at eye-level, or have the child lie on their stomach with the device in their hands in front of them.
- Hold the device straight out from your face rather than drop your head to look at it. Take breaks every 15 minutes, or don't use the device for more than 30 minutes a time with an equal rest of 30 minutes.
- Limit usage for under 6-year-olds, less than one hour per day. During rapid growth phases in older children and teens, less than two hours per day.
- Have regular spinal health checkups with your NZCA chiropractor.

View the map below for your local playgrounds, and encourage your children to play outside.

<https://www.numat.co.nz/playgrounds-near-me/>