

Kids and Back Pain: Tips to Prevent 'Back to School' Pain! (Part 1)

By Dr. Connie D'Astolfo, DC, PhD (candidate)

Part 1 – Common Causes of Back Pain in Kids

Pain in Kids - Kids have back pain too – albeit infrequent. Although back pain is generally very common for adults, it is somewhat uncommon for children and teens. By comparison, kids and teens do not typically suffer from the various pain conditions which adults experience because children and adolescents are more flexible and resilient.

In this month's article, we will identify common causes of back pain in kids of all ages.

Nevertheless, when children suffer from acute back pain, leg pain or chronic back pain, it is important to take such complaints seriously. In such cases, your Primary Health Provider or Pediatrician may wish to conduct a thorough review of your child's medical history including a physical exam. In the event that there are suspicious "episodes" of back pain, further diagnostic imaging may be required (such as an x-ray or MRI scan).

Some cases, which will typically require further assessment, include spinal fracture, disc injury, scoliosis, juvenile arthritis, infection, tumor (very rare), spondylosis (degeneration of the intervertebral discs commonly found in children and teens that tend to hyperextend their backs or bend backwards) and spondylolisthesis (displacement of a vertebral bone or "slippage" of one vertebra upon another).

Overall, the types of back pain in kids and teens tend to be somewhat age-dependent.

When it comes to younger children, they do not have medically significant back pain and any discomfort (and associated activity causing the discomfort) tends to be self-limiting. Overall, younger children do not place their spines under the same severe stresses as older children and adults. However, if a younger child does have persistent back pain despite a lack of re-injury, there is a greater probability for the possibility of a more serious condition (e.g. infection or tumor) and further diagnostics and medical examination is indicated. In particular, an infection of the spine (e.g. redness, swelling to the level of the skin) is very serious and requires prompt medical diagnosis.

By contrast, with **older children and teens**, they tend to experience more types of activities (e.g. sports) that increase the risk to the bones, soft tissues and nerves in the back. For example, with teens, compression fractures are more common and sometimes even disc injuries.

If disc material is extruded out or "herniated", the spinal cord nerve roots can be compressed causing pain along the path of that nerve (e.g. "sciatica" or buttock pain radiating down the back of a leg). Older children can also injure the joints between vertebral bones, causing painful stress injuries although nerve root damage is very rare.

Teens who tend to push themselves through

gymnastics or other "extreme" sports (e.g. skateboarding, in-line skating and stunt bike riding) will frequently land very hard on their feet or buttocks. In such cases, force may be transmitted to their vertebrae, which can result in a vertebral fracture and/or damage to the intervertebral discs.

For example, a common cause of back strain in children and teens involves habitually carrying backpacks unevenly causing muscle strain to compensate for the uneven weight. This usually means that the spine leans to the opposite side, stressing the middle back, ribs, and lower back more on one side. For many children and teens, this repetitive strain can cause muscle spasm, and back pain. In the long term, this can develop into back problems later in life if not corrected (e.g. a heavy backpack can pull on the neck muscles, contributing to headache, shoulder pain, lower back pain, and even neck and arm pain).

For some back injuries and episodes of pain, a treatment plan may be required with an eye towards developing a self-management plan and maintaining ongoing physical conditioning!

OHIP Community Physiotherapy for Children and Teens Up to 19

All patients referred to SPINEgroup® under the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's ("MOHLTC") publicly-funded "Community Physiotherapy Program" is initially assessed upon intake, triaged to a physiotherapist and case-managed throughout the "Episode of Care" ("EOC") to discharge. To be eligible for one-to-one OHIP physiotherapy, each patient must meet enrollment criteria (e.g. aged 65 years and older, aged 19 years and younger, post-hospitalization, ODSP, OW, etc.).

To inquire about our current wait times, please call us **Toll-Free at 1-888-386-1421** or local at **905-850-7746**.

Becoming a Proactive Parent on Kids Back Pain: Do's and Don'ts

- **DO** ask your child or teen when they feel back aches or pain.

- **DO** assist your child or teen in selecting the smallest backpack that will meet needs.

- **DO** speak to your kid's teachers about (a) reducing the need for children to carry heavy textbooks back and forth daily in their backpacks and (b) using lockers to regularly store unneeded books and other heavy student materials.

- **DON'T** ignore any suspicious episodes of child back or leg pain.

- **DON'T** ignore persistent infant or child crying or complaints of pain when touched.

- **DON'T** ignore abnormal posture, i.e. slumping, uneven shoulders in teens.

- **DON'T** just brush off chronic back pain or back pack strain



SPINEgroup®: Dedicated to Excellence for Spine Care

At SPINEgroup®, we strive for the highest possible standards in spine care. We are a unique clinic in Ontario that brings together a team of clinical experts trained in spine and spine related conditions targeted at diagnosing and managing chronic and complex spine pain disorders through coordinated programs of care. This means the treatment is aimed at getting you better, faster and at the lowest cost. Our chiropractor, physiotherapist, massage therapist and/or psychologist deliver the program of care and you are case managed by our staff registered nurse in conjunction with your family doctor and/or specialist(s).

WE ARE HIGHLY RECOMMENDED AND REFERRED BY MEDICAL PHYSICIANS ACROSS THE GREATER TORONTO AREA*

SPINEgroup® Vaughan Clinic is located at Unit 1, 7611 Pine Valley Drive, Woodbridge, Ontario, L4L 0A2 centrally located at the southeast corner of Highway 7 & Pine Valley Drive in the corner unit located next to TD BANK. Parking is free.

Our Unique Treatment Approach

The Spine Care program has a high success rate for complex spinal injuries and conditions including spinal stenosis, scoliosis, herniated and bulging discs, moderate to

severe disc degeneration, with on our evidence based, team modelled and self-management approach. Treatment management typically includes spinal manipulation, spinal rehabilitation, laser therapy, spinal decompression, massage therapy and psychotherapy. In most cases patients are able to receive reimbursement for the program cost through their extended benefit insurance plans.

The program length is **16 sessions over 8 weeks**, followed by a consult at one month and at three months post discharge. Patients thereafter will receive assessments (in person or through teleconference) every year to ensure continued compliance, motivation and clinical outcomes. Your medical physician will receive reports on your progress.

→ For clinical program information please contact us at **905-850-7746** or email at: **info@spinegroup.ca**

OHIP PHYSIOTHERAPY AVAILABLE NOW

@ SPINEgroup

SENIORS (65+)
CHILDREN (UNDER 19)
POST HOSPITALIZATION
ODSP/OW

Call: 905-850-7746
Languages Spoken include Italian,
Spanish, Hindi