

A bag full of school books may be minds but is it setting them up for

As students how many of us would have welcomed a school uniform that stipulated what sort of bag we carried?

The guess is not many, but this move could have prevented millions of us from the torturous back pain we suffer every day.

Research has found back pain is the leading cause of human disability and accounts for a quarter of sick days taken off work by adults.

But the problem doesn't just affect grown ups.

A growing number of children and teenagers are struggling with back pain as a result of heavy bags carried incorrectly, together with poor posture.

Lyndee Oscar, founder of Kids Backs 4 the Future and an osteopath for the past 23 years, says she is seeing more youngsters developing back problems which can be prevented with education.

"We are seeing young people with health problems that are usually associated with the older generation," says Lyndee.

"We are seeing spinal arthritic changes in 15 year olds, which you get through age and wear and tear. It's a developmental scoliosis, not congenital, something you are born with.

"Some of this is related to diet – years ago schools would give you milk on a daily basis which would help with the development of the bone structure.

"Now you have to pay for it. A lot is down to carrying very heavy school bags which hang on one shoulder, which places stress down one side of your body.

"This causes the spine to grow that way. Once the spine develops that way it can't be reversed so when they start work the damage is already done and they have to learn to adapt to life with back pain.

"When I started my career as an osteopath I was treating people in their sixties and seventies, now I am seeing people in their late twenties and early thirties with similar problems."

Research from BackCare has found a quarter of secondary school pupils suffer from regular or daily back pain.

School bag burden was associated with a ten-fold higher rate of back pain.

Back pain was also associated with prolonged sitting, which students may do for nine hours a day, according to the survey of 900 pupils.

Lyndee, who takes her campaign, Kids Backs 4 the Future, and offers workshops to students in schools in north Essex, says in her experience

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youngsters often don't talk about their back pain but accept it as a part of life.

She says: "They see their parents or grandparents complain of back pain so it is something they expect to have. As a result their pain threshold increases. These are children as young as age nine to 11.

"We want them to know it can be avoided, that there are simple techniques they can use to prevent back pain. Things like adjusting a laptop or sitting correctly.

"Even using a proper backpack and carrying it correctly on your back.

"We work through different scenarios during the workshops and students get a chance to show how they position themselves at a desk, how they carry their phones and sit with their tablets.

"We look at the individual vertebrae in the spine to see how they work. Once kids understand movement, they understand the importance of back care.

"All these will help prevent

Parents should set a good posture example

TRAINED paediatric chiropractor and general chiropractor at Cliffs Chiropractic Clinic in Southend, Arif Soomro, says: "Parents are always telling their children to sit or stand straight, but do they look at their own postures in the mirror?"

"Back care in children should be habit like brushing your teeth, seeing the dentist or ophthalmologist.

"The health of your bones are determined before adolescence. After that it is too late and you are working on eliminating the pain. Back pain is not just about posture, either. If you sit in a slumped way you are compressing your lungs, your heart needs to work harder to get blood and oxygen around the body and your brain needs oxygen to work.

"If children are slumped it affects their learning."

Arif says research has found incidences of back pain in 14 year old girls is the same as the adult population, but back pain is not a gender issue.

He explains: "Our lifestyles are more sedentary. Children



■ Spinal awareness – Lyndee Oscare with students from Colchester Academy

back pain," says Lyndee.

"That, and unlearning bad habits," she adds.

Lyndee is also a member of a special interest group on children's ergonomics with the Chartered Institute of Ergonomics and Human Factors.



■ Chiropractor – Arif Soomro

spend a lot of time on mobiles and computers and end up with what we call, texter's neck. They spend so much time looking down at their phones their head is sitting in front of their bodies instead of on top of it."

This, says Arif, leads to tension head aches, weak neck muscles and affect the nerve endings in the joints of your neck, which could even affect balance.

All of this affects the working population, says Arif, who is regional spokesman for the British Chiropractic Association and was invited to speak to the Parliament's committee on healthier children in schools.

The group is working towards putting back care onto the curriculum within the Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE), and make it a part of the education delivered by PE teachers.

"Sport, activity and development all go hand in hand," says Lyndee, who offers workshops to schools to help education youngsters on correct posture.

"We are also working towards an idea that the back pack is part of the school uniform.

"A lot of young people won't like it, but it would eliminate the chance for carrying a bag in the wrong way.

"Currently there are girls carrying very heavy bags on their elbows, which is impacting on their spines.

"Some schools in London have already adopted this philosophy. We are talking about the health of the future generation."

As part of Back Care Week last week Lyndee, who runs the Essex branch of national organisation Back Care, delivered posters to schools across north Essex to highlight back health.

Such is her determination to get the message out there, that she applied for, and won a session at Colchester Soup, a community programme whereby people pitch ideas for community projects and the audience votes on a winner, who wins the takings at the door from that night.

She is a finalist in the Essex Educations Fit 4 life Awards and was named in the top 18 of the Business Boost Awards.

Lyndee adds: "I believe it is my responsibility to use my knowledge of back care to protect the younger generation from musculoskeletal risk."

BACK CARE FACTS ...AND MYTHS

IN 2015, BackCare surveyed 900 secondary school pupils aged between 11 and 16 years across the UK, revealing that two thirds of UK secondary pupils have experienced back pain. One in four UK secondary pupils suffers from back pain regularly or every day – this was higher among girls (27 per cent) than boys (19 per cent). Neck and shoulder pain were also very common.

School bag burden was found to be very common and strongly linked to back pain. Half of those surveyed said their school bag often or always felt tiring or too heavy for them. Back pain was ten times more common amongst pupils with heavy or tiring school bags.

Pupils were asked to estimate the number of hours they spend sitting per day in the classroom, at meal times, whilst travelling, when doing homework and during their free time. It found UK secondary pupils sit for an average of nine hours per day. Back pain was almost doubled amongst pupils with higher than average sitting times.

It is a myth that you have to sit or lay still to recover from back pain. According to BackCare, you should be moving and doing physical activities to move the spine normally. Rigidly protecting your back by not moving it correctly will prevent your recovery, not help it.