

Pupil posture of your back

Is school bad for your health? We all understand the importance of looking after our backs, especially as we get older, but should concern for our posture start even sooner...even at school age?

ARIF Soomro of Cliffs Chiropractic Clinic, in Essex, certainly thinks so. "Over the past four years I've been treating more and more cases of back, neck and shoulder pain in children and teenagers

and it all seems to start at school.

"We need to take action to help them now or they will suffer in the long term."

The specialist paediatric chiropractor believes parents and carers need to understand the effect mobile devices, poor school seating and heavy rucksacks is having on the spine.

He says: "It's crucial we do everything we can to protect our spine because its health, or otherwise, impacts on every aspect of our lives. It

holds us upright, supports our weight and, most importantly, protects the spinal cord, the vital communication channel between body and brain.

"The spine gives us the ability to bend and twist, so when the spine is injured, mobility is limited. Every time we slouch at our desks, crane our necks forward to read text messages and watch Netflix rather than take some exercise, we're injuring our spines."

What are we supposed to do about it? Well, Arif says that as we age there will be natural wear and tear on the spine, but correcting your posture and keeping active are two vital habits to adopt and it's never

Guarding against back and neck pain - heavy back packs can cause pain so your child has a bag with two straps to distribute the weight evenly



Parents should observe their children's posture when they're sitting, standing and on their phones. It's important the head is over the shoulders

too soon to start.

He says: "It's not quite so easy when you're at school though. Every pupil sits on the same height chair and desk, but we all know that some children grow faster than others, so we're helping them adopt poor posture habits just though sitting in class.

It's unlikely that schools will invest in chairs and desks that can be adapted to cater for your height - although they should - so teachers need to do their bit to encourage good posture in class.

Heavy backpacks play their part too in causing back and neck pain in children and teenagers."

According to research conducted by the British Chiropractic Association, 87% of the weight in a backpack is down to text books so, if you're carrying the books in a one-strap bag this will put undue pressure on one shoulder.

Arif says: "It's better to have two straps to distribute the weight evenly and you should put the heaviest books

...taking care starts at school

at the top, not the bottom, to prevent the bag from pulling the shoulders backwards creating discomfort and imbalance." But the biggest issue is modern day living, where children in the UK aged five to 16 spend an average of six-and-a-half hours a day in front of a screen, compared with around three hours in 1995 (source: Childwise). Screen time is made up of time spent watching TV, playing on games, using a mobile phone, computer or tablet. Younger children fare slightly better; in 1995 five to ten-year-olds averaged around two-and-a-half-hours of TV and in 2014 this has risen to four-and-a-half hours. But they're all in danger of developing "text neck".

The term "text neck" was coined by Dr Kenneth Hansraj, Head of Spine Surgery at New York Spine Surgery & Rehabilitation Medicine, after research he was conducting revealed that the spinal damage caused by using our mobile devices was reaching epidemic levels.

He explained that our heads weigh between 10lbs and 12lbs but, as we angle them down to look at our mobile devices, the effective weight on our necks increases from 27lbs at a 15-degree angle to 60lbs at 60 degrees, which means you could be carrying the equivalent of a two-year-old toddler on the back of your neck virtually every time you read or send a message.

Arif says: "This pressure leads to early wear-and-tear on the spine and spinal degeneration, so you need to start lifting your phone up to eye level to read and send messages. It may look a little odd, but it's a habit worth adopting now.

"What parents should try to do ready for the new school term is observe their children's posture when they're sitting, standing and on their phones.

"It's important that their head is over their shoulders, that those shoulders aren't hunched and the neck is not craning forward.

"And please help your children move around and be active.

"Exercise is the best way of keeping the whole body healthy and the spine mobile."

For more information from Arif and his award-winning practice, visit cliffschiropractorsouthend.co.uk/ or call 01702 430430.



Back and neck pain starts at school - specialist paediatric chiropractor Arif Soomro is seeing more and more young patients with posture issues