



CSP's Back to School with Top Health Tips

Communications and Marketing

Maintaining Good Health and Wellbeing in Children

Get children in on the action

It is important to seek as much good information as possible on the benefits of good health, nutrition and exercise and get children interested in looking after their bodies. Getting parents involved in this process is also essential, as it can make learning fun, especially if they make a pact to do it together at school and at home.

The role parents and teachers play

Parents and teachers have a crucial role to play in safeguarding the health of children. They have a responsibility to tackle the important health issues. Our children's health and futures depend on how we educate them and how we set examples - good and bad. It also depends on the effort we put into achieving our goal of developing healthier future generations.

- Get informed about the health dangers of inactivity and obesity.
- Tell children about what is good for them and what is bad for them.
- Tell children about the consequences of bad diet and inactivity.
- Speak about what they have snacked on during the day or eaten at school for lunch.
- Speak about physical education (PE), find out what they enjoy doing and how they can keep it up.
- Adopt a healthy schools approach to support children who are interested and who are trying to be healthier.
- Lead by good example and show them!

Helping children who are overweight or inactive

Overweight children should be monitored closely from an early age.

- Listen to children who complain of back pain or pain anywhere else.
- Look out for children who have poor coordination skills or who find PE difficult or avoid it.
- Look out for the child who likes nothing better than to sit playing computer games while snacking on junk!!

Tips for Good Back Care

Children get back pain often because of overloading and over-stressing immature musculoskeletal structures. This can lead to long-term damage and disability. Education and prevention could be the cure. Healthy children make healthy adults.

Lighten your load - reduce the weight of your school bag by getting into a daily routine of sorting out and leaving out books that you don't need. Only carry what you'll use each day!

Designer bags - the design should be a backpack with two padded straps to distribute the weight of the bag evenly over your shoulders. The straps should be adjusted to fit. Don't carry a load on one side!

Don't slouch - on the couch or anywhere else!

Avoid slouching when standing or sitting. Choose to use furniture at home or at school that fit and are suitable for the task that you are doing. Desks should be at elbow height when you are sitting tall. Sitting on a firm cushion may help you sit taller; make sure your feet reach the floor.

Using a reading stand helps avoid excessive bending forward of your neck when reading, especially at a low table.

Take a few minutes every hour to stretch your back, you can do this while sitting.

Lose the shoes that don't tie or are too high!

Leaving your trainer laces untied not only affects your performance but can eventually give you problems with your back and your feet. Wearing shoes all day that are too high can give you problems with your back and your ankles.

Don't lift heavy weights - that includes little brothers and sisters.

Overloading and over-stressing joints in childhood can lead to damage and early degeneration processes.

Tips for staying active

'Have fun on your feet'

Children need to learn and practice fundamental motor skills and develop cardiovascular endurance, muscle strength and flexibility. Exercise can prevent obesity, improve fitness, increase bone density, improve co-ordination and improve body image and mood.

Children

- Save your computer games for the winter months, get out and about with friends while its still daylight when you get home from school.
- Sport can be competitive or non-competitive, whichever you prefer. Choose a sport that is fun for you so that you will keep it up. Ask your head teacher about forming lunchtime or after school sports clubs - for example, football, rounders, athletics, tennis, golf and netball.
- If you don't like sport how about dancing? If there are no classes in your area ask your teachers about forming a dance class after school or at lunch times.
- If you don't like dancing how about forming a walking club? This could be to and from school instead of taking the car or bus. If this is not possible ask your school about the possibility of a walking club or a 'walking bus'. A group of you can meet up in at a scheduled time and place and walk to school together.
- Swimming is an excellent form of exercise; take advantage of any concession admission fees at weekends.

Teachers

- Support and encourage physical activity for children during and out of school. PE teachers are specialists and their advice is invaluable to the class teacher.
- Support and encourage the development of school clubs, which promote physical activity.
- Encourage physical activity during the school day, for example, a 5-minute aerobic session in the middle of the day.

- Use school activity schemes to set physical activities homework for children to practise and perform, for example, ball skills, balance skills, co-ordination and stretching programmes.
- Recruit older children to volunteer to be Youth Coaches in 'Fun on your Feet Clubs' and to be active role models.

Parents

Get involved either at home or at school. Encourage and support physical activity as part your family's healthy lifestyle. Educate children that physical activity is just as important as brushing your teeth, washing your hands or getting enough sleep.

Most of all, lead by good example and do some too. Get active and you too will get the health benefits.

Tips for Schools

Teaching simple anatomy and ergonomics to children may lead to a better understanding of how their back works and therefore how to look after it better.

Classroom design - make the furniture fit the child not the child fit the furniture

- Tables and chairs need to be of the correct height. Tables should be at sitting elbow height and feet should be flat on the floor.
- Ensure children are not twisting in their seats to see you or a screen.
- Design the room so that all children can look ahead.
- Try to build in time for children to stretch or move on a regular basis throughout the day. 5 minutes stretching and stepping on the spot every hour or two can make a difference to their comfort and class performance.
- Look out for bad posture in children and try to ascertain why they are slouching, straining or twisting.

Provide storage wherever possible - to avoid children carrying heavy loads to and from school.

If lockers are not possible, consider drawers or stackable trays for books at least.

Help protect the neck - reading stands for books can avoid prolonged excessive neck flexion. This position can cause neck pain and prolonged slouching.

For further health and wellbeing tips for children, chartered physiotherapists can provide valuable advice. To locate a chartered physiotherapist in your local area visit www.physio2u.org.uk