



A JOLLY BACK IS A HEALTHY BACK

How can back health and posture be improved for children in the primary classroom?

Back health is vitally important for our children and the good news is, schools can help.

Studies show 72% of primary children have experienced back and/or neck pain during the school day, with the majority of cases unreported. Children who suffer back pain are 4 times more likely to experience it as an adults, so prevention and the formation of good habits during childhood is really key.

UK research shows, the top 3 risk factors for back pain reported by school children are: sitting in assembly, sitting on the floor, sitting on school chairs.

Ideas to help:

- Limit curved, flexed sitting postures for children (and staff). Regular changes of position and movement should be encouraged. Think “30:30 stretch and wriggle” – every 30minutes sitting, move and stretch for 30 seconds.
- Make floor sitting “more active”. Allow children to sit with their legs in a variety of positions – legs straight in front of them, to alternate sides, cross-legged or on a posture-improving cushion.
- Encourage children to have a sight check if you are concerned they are hunching over and looking very closely at their work or a screen.
- Classroom set up is important. Children should have a clear view of the board and be able to view it without twisting around. If not, can they turn their chair around or move position? Can they move places during the term so they do not develop muscles imbalances.
- Understand that if children are fidgeting, they are likely to be uncomfortable and are trying to adjust their posture. Can they stand up and move before sitting down again? Pupils are likely to be more focused afterwards.
- Trial and invest in quality, ergonomically designed school furniture which supports healthy sitting. Furniture is an investment in pupils’ health, concentration and best outcomes.
- Encourage children to tell you if they are uncomfortable at school and be aware of any pupil’s worries as this can influence back pain experienced.

Although back pain is becoming more common in children, it should never be considered normal. **All episodes of back pain lasting more than 2 weeks should be reported to a GP.** Ask if anyone in your class has back/neck pain? What do they think contributes to it? Encourage them to report any discomfort to a parent/carer.

All the best and as always if we can help further, we’d love to hear from you,
Lorna Taylor, Physiotherapist and Director, Jolly Back