



THE CHARTERED SOCIETY OF PHYSIOTHERAPY

Where can I find a physiotherapist?

There are thousands of chartered physiotherapists in the UK working from hospitals, GP surgeries, sports clubs, private clinics and many other venues. Speak to your GP about a referral to your local NHS physiotherapy service.

Alternatively, for a list of private practitioners in your area, visit www.physio2u.org.uk. When choosing a physiotherapist make sure

they have the initials MCSP (Member of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy) after their name or are registered with the Health Professions Council (HPC).

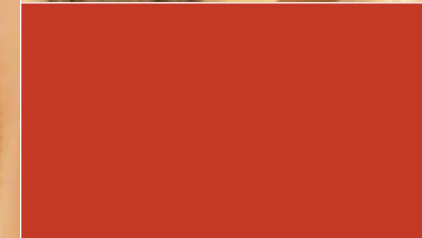
You can check their registration online at: www.hpc-uk.org. This will guarantee that they are properly qualified, governed by a professional code of conduct and covered by professional liability insurance.

BACKS for the FUTURE

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy is the professional, educational and trade union body for the United Kingdom's 47,000 chartered physiotherapists, physiotherapy students and assistants

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Back pain is a condition we usually associate with growing older. However, lifestyle changes mean back trouble is no longer confined to the adult population; more and more children and young people are also reporting discomfort





Studies show that almost half of all children of secondary school age experience occasional backache and that back pain during adolescence can mean youngsters are four times more likely to suffer the condition as adults. Childhood back pain has been related to heavy schoolbags and ill-fitting classroom furniture. These factors can certainly contribute, but physiotherapists point out that books and bags alone should not cause bad backs. It is only when the everyday physical demands of school life are combined with sedentary lifestyles and poor posture that real back problems begin to set in.

The car culture and a passion for computer games have reduced physical activity and, linked with high consumption of junk food, created a situation where inactivity and bad diets are an accepted way of life. These habits encourage poor posture

and weight gain and mean that joints and muscles are not worked through their full range and normal length. This makes it more difficult for the body to cope with day-to-day tasks. And because we take many of the practices of childhood into adult life, our chances of maintaining a healthy back later on are also greatly reduced.

Backache affects up to 95 per cent of the population at some stage and costs the economy around £10 billion a year in lost productivity and disability or sickness benefits. Given these statistics, it is important that young people develop good habits early on in life.

This leaflet gives parents advice on how to get their kids into habits that can improve their posture and protect their backs. The poster overleaf is a handy guide for children and teachers.

Adolescent back pain

The back is designed to perform many functions but it is also an especially vulnerable part of the body. This is because it serves two contradictory purposes – mobility and stability. It has to be flexible enough to cope with basic movements such as bending and twisting, but it also needs to offer stability so that we can stand upright, walk around and carry load where necessary.

Teenage backs also have to deal with the effects of puberty. Growth spurts cause big structural changes within the body as bones, muscles, nerves and connective tissues stretch and lengthen. Different parts of the body may take longer to grow than others. This can sometimes result in temporarily uneven posture and lead to pain from tightness or over-stretching muscles and nerves.

School days

In recent years, the curriculum has expanded and class sizes have swollen. Many schools have had to make sacrifices that may not be in the best interests of child health. PE lessons have been cut back to make way for more academic subjects and personal

lockers and desks with storage space have been removed to provide larger teaching areas, leaving children little choice but to carry their belongings around all day. And while secondary school children vary enormously in height, tight budgets mean classroom furniture is often 'one size fits all'. Children are at special risk of suffering discomfort from poorly designed furniture because they spend long periods sitting down. Fewer than 20 per cent of students can find suitable desk/chair combinations and many pupils sit at desks that are too big or chairs that are either too high or too low. Therefore, children need to try especially hard to maintain a good posture during lesson time. See poster for advice on school bags and sitting correctly.

At home

Recent research shows that active children and young people are less likely to get back pain in adulthood. Physios suggest that working towards a good level of fitness is one of the best things children can do for their backs and that weekends and evenings can be a great time to try a new sport or activity.



- The Healthy Schools Programme recommends one hour of moderate physical activity everyday. Regular exercise will mobilise and strengthen the spine
- Active children tend to develop better muscle tone. Strong abdominal muscles make it easier for children to maintain a good posture

Concerns about appearance, achievements and peer relationships are a common part of school-life. Evidence suggests that stress and anxiety can contribute to the development of back pain. Regular exercise is a great way of relieving the pressures of daily life. In addition to optimising physical fitness, it can boost mental health by enhancing self-esteem. Children who are confident and body aware usually adopt a more upright posture – key to a healthy back.

Use it or lose it

Nowadays, sedentary hobbies compete with physical activity. Kids used to make their own fun, but thanks to modern technology, much of that is now done for them. Studies show that six in ten children spend over 25 hours a week slouched on the sofa watching TV or sitting in awkward positions playing with games consoles.

Physiotherapists warn that unless children regularly begin putting their bodies through

a full range of motion, elasticity will cease, muscles will weaken and joints will stiffen up. Under these conditions, backs become particularly vulnerable, and by adulthood, could be feeling the full effects of an inactive youth.

Healthiness at home

As well as encouraging children to build regular activity into their leisure time, help them to improve their posture while they work and relax at home.

Follow the tips below:

- Textbooks should be propped up to prevent your child from having to hunch over to study. Adjustable desks, which can be positioned to slope slightly, are great for textbook study
- Make sure your child sits on a supportive chair, rather than a sofa or a bed, when completing homework. Feet should be on the ground, or a footrest. Hips should be slightly higher than the knees
- If your child uses a computer, position the monitor so that the screen is at eye level. This prevents children from craning their necks
- Move the keyboard about 10cm from the edge of the desk and make sure the mouse is within easy reach. The keyboard and mouse should be in a position that keeps the shoulders relaxed and the

elbows at around 90 degrees

- Sit your child square on to the computer desk on an adjustable chair. The chair's backrest should tilt slightly and allow your child to lean against it comfortably

- Encourage short breaks. Walking up the stairs or making a phone call are enough to give the body a chance to loosen up
- Watching TV and playing computer games are popular post-homework pastimes; but bear in mind that spending hours in static positions can lead to discomfort. Sitting cross-legged can tilt the pelvis, which puts stress on the lower back and lying on the floor with the trunk arched upwards can strain the neck and shoulder area. Encourage your child to swap positions regularly to avoid stiffness

Be a good role model

Finally...to help your children lead a healthy lifestyle you must set a good example!

- As a family, try to eat a well balanced diet. Inactivity has led to an increase in juvenile obesity. Being overweight places extra stress on the spinal joints, the hips and the knees
- Take the family out walking at weekends, plan activity holidays, go to your local

leisure centre, play football or tennis with your kids in the park

- Try to limit your use of the car by walking to the shops. Encourage your children to walk or cycle along safe routes to and from school.

If pain strikes

- Some children find a hot water bottle or an ice pack applied to the affected area provides relief
- Give your child some pain relief as recommended by a pharmacist, but don't exceed the stated dose
- Don't send your child to bed! Inactivity is not the correct treatment for a bad back. Gentle exercise and stretches can help reduce pain and prevent reoccurrence. A physio will be able to suggest suitable exercises and other helpful advice
- If pain lasts more than a week, your GP may recommend your child sees a paediatric physiotherapist
- This leaflet is aimed at adolescents. If a younger child experiences backache, you are advised to consult a GP as soon as possible.

Remember – prevention is better than cure, so keep this leaflet handy for easy reference.