

# **SIT UP STRAIGHT!**

Children are experiencing increasing amounts of back pain, and a lot of this is linked with the postures they are now adopting and a reduction in physical exercise.

It was not so very long ago that every child in school sat at an individual desk with an inclined lid. This sloping work surface enabled the neck and upper back to stay in a comfortable position while the child worked. Now children work at horizontal tables, this forces them to flex (curve) the neck and upper back in order to see their work. When this unnatural position is sustained over periods of time pain and stiffness will result.

One of the best ways to counteract this is to introduce a “30-30” wriggle and stretch rule – for every 30 minutes work at the desk, there should be 30 seconds of wriggling and stretching to ease out stiff muscles and joints. Even so, children should be reminded to keep their chairs close to the desk and avoid slumping forward.

It isn't only at school that problems arise; effort should be put in to creating a comfortable working environment in which children can do their homework.

Encourage children to work with textbooks propped up as this prevents them from hunching. Better still – invest in an inclined slope, which can be put on any flat surface and mimics the old-fashioned desks.

Make sure your child sits on a supportive chair while they are working – slumping on the sofa or lying on the floor is bad news.

If your child has to use a computer make sure the mouse and keyboard are within easy reach and the screen at eye level. Sit your child square to the screen. Again – encourage the “30-30” rule and get your child to take lots of short breaks.

Once homework is finished many children choose to relax by playing with computer consoles. No harm at all in the occasional game but hours hunched in front of a screen does strain the spine.

Finally, strongly encourage sport and physical activity to offset the stiffness and weakness that develops with sustained sitting. In fact don't just encourage it, be a good role model, get outside and get active yourself.

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