

Media Release

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The heavy burden being carried by young schoolchildren

Research is to be carried out at schools in the UK, amid fears that young children are being literally weighed down by their school bags.

There is concern that in many cases, children are carrying much more than the recommended maximum of 10% of their body weight, leading to posture and potentially spinal problems.

The research is to be conducted by the United Chiropractic Association (UCA), which has around 500 members nationally. And, as parents prepare for the new school year, the UCA is offering tips to parents on how to minimise the load.

Vice-president of the UCA, Paul McCrossin, has a practice in North Finchley in London and has written about the problem in the past: "For young children, 10% of their body weight might only be a few kilos so if they're carrying lots of books and things they don't really need, this will be too much weight for them. You see it every day, children with their heavy backpacks, leaning forward as they're walking."

"Carrying that sort of weight every day can certainly affect children's posture and set off issues that may develop in the future. Children can start to experience back pain from the age of 11-15 and if it starts then, there is a greater likelihood of it continuing into adulthood. Often, they and their parents don't take back pain seriously because it comes and goes. But I see people in their early 20s who tell me that their spinal problems started when they were teenagers."

Previous international studies suggest that as many as 80% of children believe their backpacks are too heavy and almost half of children feel their backpack is causing them back ache.

The new UK research hopes to discover if children here are suffering the same issues. The UCA will be weighing children and their bags at selected schools across the UK during the school year, with the results known next summer. And they will be providing advice to schools taking part in the study.

Mr McCrossin said: "The research is about educating parents and schools, to tell them that carrying these weights is potentially harmful so that they can take



preventative measures. If we can change these behaviours now, we can have an impact on future health, rather than having to fix problems down the line.”

James Love is one of the chiropractors who'll be helping to conduct the research. He has seen the problem at first hand: “I picked up my daughter's backpack and I could barely lift it. And she's only 12-years-old! She's carrying all the books she needs for the day, and she's bringing the books home again for homework. It's a significant weight.

“Schools can help the situation: they could ensure that the volume of work children are taking home is manageable and they could do posture and spinal awareness sessions with children. Even the kids on the TV show Neighbours use chiropractic backpacks which are designed specifically for high school kids.”

Mr Love is holding a special event for parents and children at his Restore Chiropractic practice in Banbury on 3 September, which will include advice about backpacks.

The UCA has produced a list of tips to prevent potential back problems for schoolchildren: always wear backpacks on both shoulders, buy a bag with thick shoulder straps to distribute the weight evenly, choose a bag made of lightweight material and has multiple compartments for better weight distribution, and adjust the straps on a backpack to ensure the bag sits above the waist which reduces the pressure on the spine. Bags with a waist strap are also recommended.

Other tips are to use school lockers where provided, use lightweight packed lunch containers and, crucially, to carry only what is absolutely needed. Ideally, parents should buy backpacks that are chiropractor-approved.

Parents can also look out for tell-tale signs that their child is struggling under the weight of their bags. Warning signs include a change in posture when wearing their backpack, tingling and numbness in the arms and hands, and back, neck or shoulder pain.