

# UCA Spinal Awareness Week 12-16 May 2014

The [United Chiropractic Association](#) (UCA) is celebrating the spine by holding a nationwide Spinal Awareness Week on 12-16 May.

Our spine is an amazing thing; it's what holds everything together! So it's important we take care of it. As part of Spinal Awareness Week, UCA, which has around 600 members nationally, is providing some top tips on how to keep your spine in tip-top shape. The good news is that in a lot of cases, the wellbeing of our spine and health is in our own hands; we might just have to tweak some of our habits.

The key to a healthy spine and, therefore, a healthy you, is the 'P' word: Posture. Posture has been an overlooked factor in our health in the past but research is helping to raise awareness about its importance.

During Spinal Awareness Week, chiropractors in UCA will focus attention on some very modern-day risks to a good posture and will also offer advice on posture in babies. Among the risks are over-use of mobile devices, carrying heavy bags and women wearing high heels.

For example, members will be raising awareness about the danger of forward-leaning posture – the habit of dropping the head forward and rounding the shoulders while using mobile devices. Studies suggest a link between forward-leaning posture in older people and hyperkyphosis, which is associated with pulmonary disease and cardiovascular problems. Those with hyperkyphosis have greater risk of mortality than those without.

Younger people are now at an increased risk of having problems through the top of their neck and back because of their posture, which is causing a change in the curve of the back. And there is an increased risk that they will develop this earlier on in life because of the length of time they've been sitting at computers or using mobile devices.

The implication of this is that they are at risk of a lower life expectancy. Why? UCA executive member Estelle Zauner-Maughan explained: "When someone drops their head forward and rounds their shoulders, it becomes impossible for them to take a full breath in because of the restriction through the muscles and because the ribs can't move properly. So the heart and lungs can't function to their full effectiveness. Research is suggesting that the decrease in life expectancy comes from this."

Modern life is also behind the increasing use of very heavy bags. As our lives have become busier, so we tend to carry more and more things around with us on a day-to-day basis – and this applies to schoolchildren as well.

The spinal healthcare experts at UCA have some great tips on how to prevent injury and chronic problems as a result of lugging around heavy bags: use a bag with lightweight material and multiple compartments to distribute the weight; pack only what you really need; use both shoulder straps when carrying a rucksack; alternate shoulders regularly to avoid strain; ensure the rucksack sits above the waist to reduce pressure on the spine and nervous system; and if you can't pack light, then use two bags.

Fashion also has a lot to answer for when it comes to bad posture habits. Ladies, did you know that even a 1-inch heel can be damaging? And as for a 3-inch heel ... this leads to a 76% increase in the weight placed on the toes. This causes the body to tilt forward and for you to overarch your back to compensate. The result? A bad posture that causes strain on the knees, hips and lower back.

Our advice is to wear trainers to and from work and only wear 'weapons of fashion' in moderation. Ideally, if you must wear heels, set a maximum of 2-inches.

The earlier we develop a good posture and healthy spine, the better for a lifetime of health. A number of UCA chiropractors have special training in paediatric chiropractic techniques and can help with the development of healthy posture habits in babies and toddlers. Research has shown that a good posture in children assists in increased learning and co-ordination.

Estelle said: "Spinal Awareness Week hopes to educate and empower people to make positive changes in their posture and their health. Great posture begins with the spine – and chiropractic is a safe and effective way to achieve a healthy spine."