

wellness thinking," says Hartman.

Chiropractors detect many chronic childhood ailments by pinpointing spinal problems. Twisting of the upper cervical vertebrae often causes tension in muscles of the Eustachian (ear) tube, blocking drainage and leading to infection. Spinal problems near the bladder may cause loss of sensation and bladder control.

AFFECTS OF EAR INFECTION

Ear infections, the most common childhood illness (35 percent of pediatric visits), can become a chronic problem that impairs hearing and speech.

"It's much easier to stay well than to get well. I want to change the paradigm from disease-based to wellness care." Dr. Tami Hartman, Family Chiropractic Center, Lake Hopatcong, NJ.

Research by Dr. Joan Fallon, a chiropractor practicing in Yonkers, NY., shows that nearly 80 percent of children treated with spinal adjustment were free

of ear infections for at least six-months.

"Chiropractic mobilizes drainage of the ear, and if ears can continue to drain without a buildup of fluid and subsequent infection, children build up their own antibodies and recover more quickly," she explains.

CHANGING BEHAVIOR

The American Chiropractic Association (ACA) notes that in the past decade prescriptions for Ritalin, medication for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), increased five-fold.

Medications control, but don't cure

ADHD. "In ADHD, musculoskeletal imbalance creates imbalance of brain activity, and one part of the brain develops faster than the other," says Dr.

Robert Melillo, whose multi-disciplinary chiropractic clinic on Long Island, NY., specializes in treatment of neurological disorders. There are promising results with non-drug treatments that focus on postural muscles, nutrition and lifestyle changes that affect brain activity.

SPORTS INJURIES

Children are exposed to numerous bodily insults from daily activities. Dr. Steven Loniewski, who is a Certified Chiropractic Sports Practitioner at Chiropractic Family Health Center, Hazlet, NJ., treats sprains and strains, twisted ankles, knees and shoulders. "We probably cannot prevent sports-related injuries, but we see that children treated with chiropractic before injuries are more easily treated following injury."

By encouraging warm-up exercise, conditioning, proper diet, hydration, weight control and sleep, parents help children avoid sports-related injuries.

Easing the load

By Kathy Mullins

Researchers and chiropractors confirm that backpack stress is a real threat to the health of children. Dr. George Ellwanger at Cary Family Chiropractic in NC says, "We're seeing children with backpack stress to the lower back and neck."

A British study by Dr. Francis Smith, Scottish sports medicine physician, has found that almost one child in 10 show signs of back problems before puberty. MRI scans showed that 14 of 154 10-year-olds reporting no back pain had signs of intervertebral disc degeneration. The improper use of backpacks is one of the causes.



It's never too early to teach children about wise style choices and the potential for injury.

- **Choose lighter weight back packs** with multiple compartments that distribute weight. Padded back pads protect children from bruising. Buckling a hip strap or waist belt can redistribute as much as 50-70 percent of weight from the shoulders and back to the pelvis.
- **Consider rolling back packs** if the school allows them. Many don't because they can cause tripping. Wheels add extra weight should bags need lifting.
- **Buy the right size.** Excess space is an invitation to overloading. Packs should be proportionate to body size, fall below the top of the shoulder and above the top of the hipbone.
- **Use two straps.** A backpack slung over one shoulder puts uneven

weight on the shoulders. The spine compensates by leaning to the opposite side, causing muscle and back strain. Weight pulling on the neck muscles, leads to headache and neck pain. Padded, wide, adjustable shoulder straps protect shoulders.

- **Keep it light.** The ACA recommends restricting back packs to 5-10% of the child's body weight. Toting heavy packs can distort natural curves in the middle and lower back, cause muscle strain and spinal irritation. Wearers develop poor posture by leaning forward and arching the back to compensate. Encourage a weekly cleanout.
- **Encourage kids to utilize lockers,** reloading books throughout the day.
- **Pack heaviest objects first** so they are carried lower and closest to the body. Use compartments to distribute weight.
- **Lift correctly.** Face the pack, bend knees and grip with both hands. Let leg muscles do the lifting, and then position shoulder straps.