

SPINAL HEALTH WEEK MAY 1 TO 7

Children learn a healthy spine is essential to good health and well-being

In order to benefit from healthy habits later in life, it's important to establish them at an early age. That's common knowledge.

Some daily routines like brushing our teeth come so naturally, we don't even think about it - we just do it. But dental health is not the only health routine that needs to be learned early in life. That's why the Ontario Chiropractic Association has developed its unique Spinal Health Week Program for the week of May 1 to 7.

Created in 1985, the program is designed to let children and their parents know that a healthy spine is essential to

good health and general well-being and to foster good habits among students. Today more than 80 per cent of Canadians experience back problems at some time during their lives, many of which are avoidable if positive lifestyle and postural habits are developed early in life, said Dr. John Fujimagari, of the Markham Pain Clinic.

"Next to the common cold, back pain is the most common reason for people going to the doctor," he said. "We believe that is because people are not taught good spinal health habits."

The Spinal Health Program builds the children's understanding year by year, from Grade 3 through to Grade 6. The focus is understanding the importance of the spine and its relationship to overall health.

Teaching materials focus on cartoon character "Inspector Spine", who shows youngsters how good spinal health works and sets out basic rules of good spinal health - proper posture and nutrition, exercise, good sleep habits and a positive mental outlook - through a series of booklets, one for each grade level. In conjunction with public and separate school boards across the province, the Ontario Chiropractic Association will distribute 550,000 "Inspector Spine" booklets and 15,000 posters this year.

The Spinal Health Week message also serves to let people know that chiropractors are concerned with much more than just sore backs. Chiropractic is the second largest health profession in the world, the third largest in Canada following physicians and dentists. The word "chiropractic" itself is derived from the Greek words "cheir" and "praktikos", meaning "done by hand". It is a natural approach to health based on the relationship between the nervous system and the function of every cell, tissue, organ, and system of the body.

Ontario's Doctors of Chiropractic are authorized to diagnose and treat conditions concerning the spine, muscle and nervous systems. They work to promote optimal health and wellness through positive lifestyle choices such as good nutrition, and exercise. Chiropractic is not intended to replace modern medicine, rather, to offer an alternative approach to certain types of illnesses and ailments.

Headaches, arm and leg pain, and some internal disorders can be symptoms of problems with the spine and spinal nerves. Accidents or major traumas are not necessary to bring about such symptoms; often changes in habits or patterns are enough to cause problems.

For example, children starting Grade 1 are required to sit for

several hours at a stretch although, up to that point in their lives, remaining still in a chair was a relatively rare occurrence. Suddenly they will develop new postural habits, many of which are not healthy but will stay with them the rest of their lives.

"A lot of children have never had a spinal exam," said Dr. Fujimagari. "They have their teeth checked, their eyes checked, their blood checked, but not their spines. During their growing years, children should be screened on a regular basis."


Birth can be one of the most traumatic experiences in the life of a human spine, said Dr. Fujimagari. Even infants can benefit from a chiropractic examination.

Typically, though, once a child is walking upright is the time to begin the screening process; to look for abnormal curvatures or muscular problems. Particularly during Spinal Health Week, local chiropractors are encouraging parents to bring their children in to have their spine checked.

A more sedentary lifestyle is suspected as the reason for an upswing in the number of back ailments in people of all ages. Today, people spend far more time sitting than they did in previous generations, and sitting places six times more pressure on the lumbar disc as does standing. Contrary to

popular thought, people who engage in little physical activity have more back problems than those doing more active, physical tasks.

One of the most popular misconceptions hampering the chiropractic profession today, said Dr. Fujimagari, is the belief that it will hurt to have a spinal adjustment done. On the contrary. Like lifting a heavy rock off your toe, most patients report their adjustments feel good. When the bones of the spine return to a more normal position, nervous system function can be restored, symptoms relieved and the natural healing process can begin.



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