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Aussie kids risk spinal damage – observational study

- *New 'under cover' research from the Chiropractors' Association of Australia reveals an alarming 75% of Australian schoolchildren do not use the ergonomic features built into their school backpacks.*
- *79% of school bags are full to the point of being over packed and bulging.*
- *90% of school children have bad posture while carrying their school bags*

An alarming 90 per cent of school children have bad posture when carrying their bags and could experience spinal damage as a result, while 75 per cent are not using their school backpack's ergonomic features which could prevent such damage, according to an Australian first observational chiropractic study.

The Chiropractors' Association of Australia (CAA) study, conducted by CAA chiropractors on high-traffic school commute routes, found most Aussie kids are exacerbating the problem by wearing their backpacks too low on their backs (33 per cent) or slinging them over one shoulder (20 per cent).

And a parental survey conducted in tandem with the in-field observational study revealed many children are also carrying the equivalent of up to 17 per cent of their body weight in their school bags, almost twice the recommended maximum weight, as they make their way to and from school.

"These results are a major concern for the health of our schoolchildren", said CAA spokesperson Dr. Billy Chow.

"Despite the increased use of technology in schools to assist learning, schoolchildren are still overloading their backpacks with textbooks, sports and other gear or simply not wearing them in the correct way. Putting too much stress on a child's back at such an important stage of growth and development will result in serious spinal problems immediately and later on in life."

Some of the problems caused by bad posture at an early age include reduced mobility, possible early degeneration of bones and joints, increased vulnerability to injuries and unhealthy pressures on a child's nervous system.

The parental survey also revealed parents are unaware of the problem and do not know the correct method for wearing backpacks.

Forty per cent of parents surveyed were oblivious to their child's poor posture, despite one in three being concerned their children do not wear their backpacks in the correct position.

Furthermore, more than a quarter of parents are unsure if their child's backpack has basic design features such as contoured shoulder and sternum straps and adjustable waist belts to prevent back problems and chronic disability. This is despite more than 85 per cent of parents saying it is important that backpacks are ergonomically sound and one in five parents identifying ergonomic features as their primary consideration when purchasing a backpack.

To avoid the back to school backache, the CAA recommends:

- Backpacks should ideally be no heavier than 10 per cent of a student's weight when packed.
- Make sure the backpack is sturdy and appropriately sized – no wider than the student's chest.
- Choose a backpack with broad, padded shoulder straps.
- Use both shoulder straps – never sling the pack over one shoulder.
- Use waist straps attached – they are there for a good reason.
- Don't wear the backpack any lower than the hollow of the lower back.
- Don't overload the backpack – use school lockers and plan homework well in advance.
- Place all heavy items at the base of the pack, close to the spine, for a better distribution of the weight.

"Going back to school should not mean putting your back out," Dr. Billy Chow said. "What these results show is that while nearly all schoolchildren have bad posture while carrying backpacks, there is a lack of knowledge about how to identify what is bad posture, and therefore how to improve it.

"By raising awareness among parents, teachers and the public about the importance of good posture for schoolchildren, we can help reduce the cases of spinal injuries we see now and in the future."

Visit www.whatsyourposture.com.au for more information and a simple tool that can help people check their family and friends' postures.

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For more information, or to set up an interview, please contact:

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The Chiropractors' Association of Australia

The Chiropractors' Association of Australia (National) Limited (CAA) is the peak body representing chiropractors. An underlying principle of chiropractic is "healthy spine, healthier life". By offering expert, drug-free spinal health care and lifestyle advice, chiropractors help Australians lead and maintain healthy lives. With more than 2,700 members, the CAA is the largest chiropractic health body in Australia, and coordinates its efforts with its eight autonomous CAA state and territory organisations.