

# SEPTEMBER 2007



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## Backpack Safety

September is Backpack Safety Awareness Month. With the beginning of the school year, many parents rush out to buy new backpacks for the students. They are asked to buy the latest character, color, style, etc. in order for the student to actually like the backpack that they are lugging around at school. Unfortunately, many of these "popular" backpacks are not made with the students' comfort or spinal health in mind.

Back pain is extremely common among American adults, however a new trend is showing up that is cause for concern. Young children are suffering from back pain much earlier than previous generations. Overweight backpacks are a major contributing factor in this pain. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission reports that backpack-related injuries sent more than 7,000 people to the emergency room in 2001.

Young children are complaining about back, neck and shoulder pain. This is not surprising when you stop to think about how much weight they carry in their backpacks. Not only are the packs overweight, they are not carried correctly. Carrying the pack slung over one shoulder may be the "in" thing, but it causes much more strain on the spine, and increases the likelihood of back, neck and shoulder injuries in the younger students.

The American Chiropractic Association (ACA) suggests that backpacks weigh no more than 10% of the child's body weight. Additionally, the use of ergonomically correct backpacks can help prevent spinal strain as well.

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Tips to help minimize pain from backpacks:

- 1) be sure that the weight of the pack is no more than 10% of the child's body weight
- 2) the pack should never hang more than 4 inches below the waistline
- 3) individualized compartments can help position contents of the pack effectively
- 4) be sure that pointy or bulky objects are packed away from the area that rests against the back
- 5) do not get an overly large pack - children tend to fill all available space
- 6) encourage your student to wear the pack on both shoulders
- 7) get a pack with wide, padded shoulder straps that are adjustable to your child

If you or your child experiences pain or discomfort from backpacks, please call Dr. Howard for an appointment. Also, for the month of September, Dr. Howard will offer to evaluate the backpack that your child has for free. Bring the child with the pack (in its usual state of fullness) to the office and I'll be happy to check out the pack and offer suggestions to help prevent backpack related pain and injury.

## Asthma

Asthma cases have increased by more than 60% in the US since the early 1980's. Asthma-related deaths have doubled to 5,000 per year. Those of us who are in our 30's can remember a few kids who had asthma or breathing troubles when we were in grade school, however, now it seems that most kids are running around with inhalers in their pockets!

Researchers do not know why asthma is increasing so much and so quickly. They think that it is a combination of genetics and exposure to environmental allergens. Dr. Scott Bautch, member of the American Chiropractic Association's Council on Occupational Health states that "Thirty years ago, Windex was the only cleaning solvent used. Now, we have a special cleaning solvent for every object. In addition, furniture and carpets are produced with formaldehyde as a preservative, and people breathe it."

Dr. William E. Walsh, MD, FACC, an allergist in Minnesota states that "Fifty years ago we lived in old, drafty houses, and the breeze dried and freshened the air, and cleared out mold and other allergens. Nowadays, our super-insulated houses don't breathe adequately. Making basements into a living space increases mold exposure because mold grows in any basement."

In addition to the air quality and increased exposure to toxins in the environment, our food is another source of exposure to allergens. Food manufacturers are putting

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*Inhalers are becoming more commonplace in today's society.*

preservatives in the foods to store them longer. Researchers are hypothesizing that the increase in vaccinations, cesarean births, and antibiotic intake may be playing a role in this increase in asthma as well.

**Other causes:** Stress can induce or aggravate asthma as well. Emotional expressions such as fear, anger, frustration, hard crying, or laughing can also cause asthma attacks. Reducing stress levels of asthma sufferers can be a significant addition to the treatment plan for these patients. Relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, and stress management will help with these cases. Massage, chiropractic care, breathing exercises and acupuncture can also help the asthma sufferers and be a great adjunct to traditional therapy and treatment of asthma.

**Treatment?** Asthma is a chronic disease that can not be cured, it can only be controlled. The best results for most asthma sufferers is to work with a primary care physician as well as an expert in asthma. Treatments typically include medication as well as reducing the exposure to the substances that induce acute episodes of asthma.

Chiropractors can play a key role in helping improve the quality of life of asthma sufferers. Chiropractors assess the patient's physical status as well as their lifestyle, diet, and stressors. Many chiropractors can assist the patient, family, and medical doctors to identify the key stressors and triggers of asthma. Chiropractic care also ensures proper alignment of the spine, thus giving the nervous system every opportunity to work to its fullest potential to help reduce the severity of a patient's asthma.

## Menstrual Problems and Chiropractic Care

I have been asked by a current patient to address the topic of menstrual problems and how chiropractic care can help with these issues. Coincidentally, September is National Gynecological Cancer Awareness Month, Menopause Awareness Month, and Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month. While I won't be discussing these conditions specifically, I will discuss some general problems that many females have, and how alternative therapies can help.

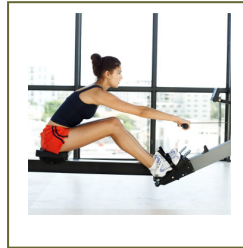
The menstrual cycle is the monthly preparation of the female reproductive system to prepare for fertilization of the egg and implantation of the embryo into the uterus. The changes that occur monthly are caused by hormones in the brain, the pituitary gland, and the ovary. These hormones are cyclic – and they change throughout the month, every month.

While the menstrual cycle is a normal physiological process, symptoms can be uncomfortable. For up to 10% of women, these symptoms can be quite severe. They can interfere with activities of daily living and significantly decrease the quality of life of the woman who experiences the symptoms. Some symptoms that these women experience include: heavy or prolonged bleeding (menorrhagia), painful periods (dysmenorrhea), bloating, breast changes/tenderness, mood changes, and skin changes. For these women, and others who have less severe problems, some interventions can be attempted to help relieve the symptoms.

### **Treatment options:**

Many women use common, nonspecific home remedies for the symptoms that they experience. These remedies include bed rest, heat, and distraction. While these may help with milder symptoms, they are not always completely helpful for the more severe symptoms, or for every woman. Some additional treatments options include:

*Diet:* A study published in 1996 states that a study using



*Regular exercise can help reduce the symptoms of dysmenorrhea.*

42 adolescents with dysmenorrhea were given either a placebo or fish oil supplements (Omega-3 fatty acid). After 2 months, the group with the fish oil supplements reported a significant decrease in symptoms.

*Exercise:* Many varied studies attempting to address the correlation of exercise to dysmenorrhea indicate that regular exercise helps reduce the symptoms in many females.

*Acupuncture:* A study published in 1987 designed to address the effectiveness of acupuncture for dysmenorrhea found that women who received acupuncture for 3 weeks prior to their periods rated their pain to be about half as severe as usual. Personally, I have used acupuncture in the clinic on several young ladies with dysmenorrhea with very favorable results.

*Chiropractic:* A study in 1992 followed 45 women with dysmenorrhea. 24 of these women received chiropractic adjustments and 21 received “sham” adjustments (they did not actually get an adjustment – it was like a placebo pill). The results of this study showed that the group who received the real adjustments had less pain than the other group.

*Calcium:* Two separate studies, one in the late 1980's and the other in 1998 looked at the effect of calcium supplementation and menstrual problems. Both studies found that after three consecutive cycles of receiving calcium, women noted significant improvement in

abdominal cramps, back pain, mood swings, depression, tension, anxiety, anger, swelling of the extremities, breast tenderness, abdominal bloating, headache, fatigue, food cravings, and overall achiness.

*Magnesium:* Magnesium has been used for cycle-related mood changes. A study in 1991 found that taking magnesium 3 times per day during the second half of the menstrual cycle significantly reduced menstrual symptoms. Another study also noted that women taking magnesium reported significant improvements in swelling, weight gain, breast tenderness and bloating if taking the magnesium for consecutive cycles.

The treatments that I have mentioned here are all “alternative” treatments, meaning they are not what the mainstream medical doctors recommend. Many young women who have seen their medical doctors or gynecologists for menstrual pain or problems tend to walk out of the office with birth control pills, pain pills, and/or diuretics. They are also often told that the pain is “normal” or “not as bad as they think.” I strongly urge all women to continue to seek help for these issues.

*“More than 5.5 million women in the US are affected by endometriosis.”*



*Chiropractic adjustments can help reduce menstrual pain.*

While many symptoms associated with the menstrual cycle are benign and merely “part of being female”, some are not. Some women suffer in pain for years before finding a physician who will sit down and listen to their symptoms and complaints. One such condition that is often not diagnosed, especially in the young female, is endometriosis.

**Endometriosis** is actually quite common and is one of the top three causes of infertility in women. More than 5.5 million women in the US are affected by endometriosis. Common symptoms of endometriosis include pain just before and during periods (excruciating menstrual cramp pain), intestinal pain and upset, low back or pelvic pain, pain during or after intercourse, heavy periods, fatigue, and painful bowel movements and/or urination during menstrual periods.

Endometriosis occurs when cells from the lining of the uterus implants outside the uterus – however, it continues to grow and function in its new location. This causes inflammation and scarring outside the uterus. Usual places for endometriosis growths include the ovaries, fallopian tubes, behind the uterus, on the bowel or bladder, or other areas of the body (such as lungs and brain). There is no cure for endometriosis, and the cause of endometriosis is still unknown.

Diagnosis of endometriosis is made mainly on symptoms; however, laparoscopic surgery is the definitive way to diagnose endometriosis. As stated, there is no cure for endometriosis; however, there are some treatments that can help manage the pain and symptoms. These treatments include all of those listed in this article for other menstrual problems, as well as other traditional medical approaches.

If you do have menstrual difficulties, pain, or other problems, please feel free to come in and talk to me about your issues. While I can not perform surgery to diagnose major diseases, I can help with symptom management and I can work with your medical doctor or gynecologist to help you with your problems.