



What the School Nurse Probably Missed

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Most of us adults clearly remember scoliosis screening in school, usually around age 13. The school nurse would give us a cursory glance from the back, and then have us bend over to touch our toes while running a hand up our spine. Unfortunately, the procedures haven't changed much, and this is really not the best way to check for the serious condition of scoliosis. Not to mention the fact that scoliosis begins much earlier than age 13 and can be more effectively corrected if it is diagnosed at a younger age. However, this article isn't about scoliosis. Scoliosis is a legitimate, serious postural concern that should be evaluated more carefully, but I think it's even more important that you know about a spinal problem that your child is more likely to have and is not evaluated AT ALL in the school environment – forward head posture.

Take a good look at your child from the side. The middle of his or her ear should sit vertically over the middle of the shoulder. It is becoming more and more common to see children whose heads are shifted forward, with the ear several inches in front of the middle point of the shoulder. We are seeing this increasing trend due to heavy backpacks, long hours in front of the TV, video game console, or computer, and decreased time spent doing physical activities. In our tech-based world, a student's life is spent mostly sitting with the head jutting forward.

This may seem like no big deal, but this forward head posture can stretch the spinal cord, spinal nerves and put undo pressure on the muscles and bones of the neck and shoulder regions. Headaches, neck pain, shoulder pain, mid-back pain and even some neurological effects like vertigo, visual field changes and balance problems are some of the symptoms that we see in kids who have these postural changes. On top of that, our children and teenagers have skeletal systems that are still forming and growing. This postural abnormality, forward head posture, can result in permanent changes in the bony structure as a child grows, just like in scoliosis can. Once the growth process is complete, it may be much more difficult, or impossible, to correct.

Contrary to parental instincts, just telling our children to “stand up straight” doesn't work to correct this problem. The repetitive activities that have created the problem have reconditioned the part of the brain responsible for controlling posture, the cerebellum. Kids can think about standing up straight for a short period of time, but then the default from the brain takes over. Changing this posture involves re-training the brain, muscles, ligaments and changing behaviors such as TV watching position.

This is a serious situation that is newly emerging in our highly technical world. But, we can help to prevent the next generation from being plagued by chronic headaches and pain by addressing these problems while they are young. Take a look at your child from the side as he or she leaves for school tomorrow. If the ear is shifted more than an inch or two forward from the center point of the shoulder, have your child evaluated by a chiropractor for forward head posture. Your child will never get a second chance to grow and develop his or her bone structure – make sure it grows right!

Dr. Whitehead is a family chiropractor in Mooresville with an extensive post-doctoral certification in pediatrics. Her office, Advanced Spinal Fitness, provides comprehensive care for the whole family, including postural re-training programs for pain relief and wellness. Find out more at www.AdvancedSpinalFitness.net.