

YOUR HEALTH

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Your Child May Be At Risk!

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Children are exposed to significant risk factors for musculoskeletal injuries. Some of these injuries may predispose your child to chronic pain problems in later life. A common problem that school-aged children are faced with is carrying a heavy backpacks to and from school on a daily basis. Backpacks have gotten much heavier over the past ten years. In fact, studies have shown that many children carry backpacks that weigh more than 30 percent of their body weight, exceeding the limits for adults!

If your school-aged child is complaining of back pain, you may want to put his or her backpack on a scale. Any backpack that weighs more than ten percent of your child's body weight, exposes your child to a severe risk of acute and chronic low back pain. By carrying a heavy backpack on a daily basis for several years, your child may be set up to develop chronic back pain problems during the adult years. Back pain develops slowly over time and is often described as a "degenerative cascade," meaning that over time micro-injuries to the structures in the back deteriorate resulting in chronic pain problems. A sensible solution is providing your child with a backpack on

wheels which will eliminate the constant stress on your child's back muscles and spine. For persistent pain problems, consult with your physician or physical therapist.

Another potential problem is related to the popularity of scooters. Many children ride their scooters without any protective gear and are prone to moderate injuries as a result of falls. Last year, more than 30,000 visits to emergency rooms were due to injuries from scooters alone!

A common injury with scooters and also bicycles involves the temporomandibular joints or jaw joints. Children often fall on their chin and experience cuts and abrasions underneath the chin. While these cuts may require stitches in some instances, they generally heal without major complications, however, whenever children fall on their chin, an evaluation by a dentist or physical therapist with special training in temporomandibular joint problems is warranted.

The forces involved in such falls may predispose the jaw bones and jaw joints to permanent changes and cause severe growth deformities. In young adults with chronic temporomandibular pain, the cause of the problem can often be traced back to a childhood fall on the chin and many of these patients have old scars on their chin.



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Diagnostic studies, such as X-rays or magnetic resonance imaging, demonstrate growth deformities of the jaw and severe displacements of the structures within the jaw joints. Temporomandibular pain problems are very disabling and may include chronic headaches, tooth pain, ear aches, ringing in the ears, difficulties with chewing and swallowing and severe facial pains. Preventing these problems can often be accomplished by early intervention immediately after the injury! Trying to resolve the pain problems during adulthood is much more complicated and requires frequent and long-term physical therapy intervention. Insist that your child wears protective gear, including a helmet, and elbow and knee pads. An ounce of prevention goes a long way!