Back Pain in Children

The usual adult back problems of slipped discs and arthritis are usually not the back problems found in children. However, pre-teens and adolescents most often have back pain due to the same issues that adults do – this includes strain and direct injury. Under age 10 it is unusual to complain of back pain, so your child's provider may look for other causes. The most common problems of low back pain and muscle strain usually get better with rest. Most back pain in children can be diagnosed with the use of a history and physical exam. Laboratory work and specialized x-rays may be done if the reason for the problem is not obvious.

CAUSES

Depending on the age of the child, the most common causes of back pain are:

- Strain – from sports or from something as simple as a back pack that is too heavy.
- Direct injury.
- Birth defects in the spine bones.
- Infection in or near the spine.
- Arthritis of the spine joints.
- Kidney infection or stones.
- Muscle aches due to virus infection.
- Pneumonia.
- Belly (*abdominal*) organ problems.
- Tumors.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Because most back pain in children is related to soft tissue injury, rest will usually solve the problem.
- Give medicine as directed.
- Backpacks should never weigh more than 10 to 20 percent of the child's weight.
- Avoid soft mattresses.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF YOUR CHILD HAS:

- Pain not relieved with rest or medicine
- Increasing pain which is not relieved with medicine or rest.
- Increasing pain going down into the legs or buttocks.
- Pain not better in 1 week.
- Night pain.
- Weight loss and fever.
- Refusal to walk.
- Fever, chills.
- Cough.
- Belly pain.
- New symptoms.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF YOUR CHILD DEVELOPS:

- Problems with walking.
- Weakness in the legs
- Numbness in the legs
- Problems with bowel or bladder control.
- Blood in the urine or stools or pain with urination.
- Warmth, or redness over the spine.

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