

September brings the start of school, and big changes for kids' schedules, physical and mental demands. Here are some tips to help your kids start the school year off right.

Back Packs

Choose well: Find a pack that is the right size and fit for your child.

- Width: Should fit between shoulders
- Length: Should sit just above hip level, in the arch of the low back
- Wide, padded straps to spread weight comfortably over the shoulders
- Lightweight pack with back padding

Wear it well: Stand tall with shoulders down and back.

- Keep the load close to the body
 - Pack heaviest items closest to the back
 - Shorten shoulder straps so the pack does not sag down
 - Look for waist straps to help spread the load, and compression/side straps (to tighten the bag and help hold it close)
- Don't overload! Kids packs should not exceed 10 % of their body weight
 - For a 65-70 pound child, this means no more than a 10 pound pack

Shoes

With the miles that kids will put on their feet and shoes, footwear can make a big difference. Look for supportive shoes that will help your child's alignment from the ground up, including:

- Good arch support – the insole should not be completely flatsorry kids, skateboard shoes are generally not a good school shoe!
- Flexible forefoot – shoe should bend easily across the middle of the foot
- Supportive heel – you should not be able to bend the heel of the shoe easily

Rest

Help your children to establish good routines and sleep habits in the weeks ahead, to ensure they are well rested and have adequate time to recuperate for each new day.

Physical Activity

Regular and varied exercise is vital to the physical and mental health of every growing child. Positive participation builds confidence and enjoyment, for lifelong healthy habits. A new school year is a good time to double check that your child has regular opportunities for engaging physical activity within a supportive environment.

Help prevent overuse injuries as kids return to more intensive sport schedules by:

- Ensuring adequate rest between similar physical sports
- Varying physical activities to encourage balanced muscle development and to prevent repetitive strain
- Keeping an eye on your child's posture. Increased physical output with poor alignment is likely to lead to pain/injury down the road



Back to School - Tips for Kids' Health - Continue

Posture

Return to school is likely to bring increased time sitting at desks, computers and doing homework. Poor sitting posture is common, and when sustained, can lead to pain and alignment issues. Many children slide down, letting their backs fall into a c-curve, with shoulders forward and their chin jutting out.

What can parents do?

- Help your child find a well fitting table and chair for homework/computer use at home
- Encourage good sitting posture:
 - Shoulders over hips, ears over shoulders
 - Hips and knees at 90 degrees (square angle)
 - Feet flat on the floor (a must- use a stool for foot support, if needed)
- Ensure your child's school desk and chair are at the proper height
- Try a ball chair that will encourage good posture (and is fun!)

Ideas to help develop good posture:

- Helping to carry in grocery bags and lift them to the counter is a great way to help strengthen shoulder girdle and core muscles (and is good prep for carrying backpacks!)
- Walking and hiking are excellent ways to strengthen muscles and can be great family, or one-on-one fitness outings. Consider walking to school or even to the store

If you would like more information regarding any of the topics above, or you would like to discuss specific strategies to help your child get this school year off to the right start, we invite you to contact our clinic directly.

Occupational therapy can help children to improve fine motor skills, their ability to focus, and their success within school and peer environments.

Physiotherapy can help to improve children's confidence and eagerness for physical activity, to improve posture and mobility, and to prevent sport related and over-use injuries, as kids return to more organized sporting activities.



September brings a new year full of opportunities for every child. Helping your child to maximize their success in school and enjoyment for physical activity, will help to build life-long healthy habits, a positive outlook and strong self-image.

Ready, set, GO (HAVE FUN)!