

21 January 2010

## CHIROPRACTORS WARN SCHOOL BAGS BAD FOR BACKS

The Chiropractors' Association of Australia (CAA) has called on Australia's educators to rethink the load they are placing on students' backs – literally.

"There is mounting evidence pointing to the fact that heavily laden school bags place unnecessary stress on growing spines and can lead to acute and long-term back problems," warned CAA national spokesperson, Dr Patrick Sim, chiropractor.

"Lugging an overloaded school bag to and from school is an outdated concept that must be discouraged.

"Why treat our kids as pack horses when most of the information they need at school or for homework could be contained on a tiny memory stick?"

According to Dr Sim, a growing child should limit the weight they carry in a school backpack to no more than 10 per cent of their body weight.

"That's only around 4-5 kilos for a 40-50kg student and it quickly adds up when you throw in a few text books, pencil case, lunch box and water bottle," he said.

A survey by CAA in Victoria into the average bag weights of 1,000 children found that almost half (486 children) carried bags well over the 10 per cent recommendation.

"Lifting a bag that is too heavy causes immediate strain on the spine," Dr Sim explained. "The longer a child carries that load, the more severe the damage.

"The problem is compounded even further by badly loaded bags, poor posture and the 'fashion factor' which dictates the latest trendy way for carrying the bag, usually negating any inbuilt ergonomic features."

With the 2010 school year about to kick off, Dr Sim is realistic about the fact that we have a long way to go before heavy text books are replaced with memory sticks and he is encouraging parents and students to brush up on their bag carrying technique now to prevent problems later in life."

The CAA recommends a fitted backpack, worn properly – over both shoulders with the waist band done up – as a growing back's best bet, while wheeled bag options should be treated with caution.

"A wheeled bag with an extendable handle may seem like a good solution for a heavy load but they aren't designed for the routine wear and tear that a trip to school entails," Dr Sim explained.

"Students may have to pull a bag over rough ground or grassy areas as well as lift it up stairs and on and off public transport. All of these actions impact normal posture and could prove problematic in the long run.

**To avoid the back to school backache, the Chiropractors' Association of Australia recommends:**

- ✓ Backpacks should be no heavier than 10 per cent of a student's weight when packed.
- ✓ Make sure the backpack is sturdy and appropriately sized – no wider than the student's chest.

- ✓ Put comfort and fit at the top of the priority list, rather than good looks.
- ✓ Choose a backpack with broad, padded shoulder straps.
- ✓ Use both shoulder straps – never sling the pack over one shoulder.
- ✓ Use waist straps attached – they are there for a good reason.
- ✓ Don't wear the backpack any lower than the hollow of the lower back.
- ✓ Don't overload the backpack – use school lockers and plan homework well in advance.
- ✓ Place all heavy items at the base of the pack, close to the spine, for a better distribution of the weight.

**ENDS**

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## **INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITY**

Dr Patrick Sim, Chiropractors' Association of Australia national spokesperson is available to discuss issues associated with back to school back care to coincide with the start of the 2010 school year. Tel: 0414 634 016.

**For further information or to request interviews please contact:**  
Hinda Smith or Kelly Ward at The Reputation Group on 03 9820 2633.

### **About the Chiropractors' Association of Australia**

The Chiropractors' Association of Australia (National) Limited (CAA) is the peak body representing chiropractors in Australia. It has state associations in all states and territories of Australia.

The Association has a current membership of approximately 2,500 members. The national body is involved with such matters as education, publications, conventions, international relations and the liaison with federal government authorities.

The CAA actively promotes the profession within Australia to the general public and to other professionals in health related fields.