

## *Orthopaedic Connection*

### **Children and Back Pain Don't Mix**

By Thomas J. Haverbush, M.D.  
Orthopaedic Surgeon

#### *Transforming patient information into patient understanding.*

Back pain in children is completely different than in adults. That is the first **key point**. Most adults as we know too well, have back pain off and on. It's almost expected. I know how to evaluate and treat it.

In children the cause of the back pain is much more likely to be due to a serious cause. It is especially true if the child is 4 years or younger.

**Red flags** in a child of any age with back pain are:

- Fever or weight loss
- Weakness in the legs
- Numbness in the legs or hips
- Trouble walking or pain that goes down one or both legs
- Bladder or bowel problems
- Pain at night, can't sleep

#### **Muscle Strain**

Muscle strain in the middle or lower back gets better in a day or two with rest.

Many teenagers have back pain from tight hamstrings and weak abdominal muscles. After evaluation I would usually have them seen by a Physical Therapist for an exercise program and they get better.

#### **Red Flag**

If pain lasts more than two days or gets worse the child must be seen. Serious causes of back pain need to be detected early or they may become worse.

#### **My Evaluation**

A complete history and physical exam is always first. Laboratory tests might be needed depending on the child's age and the problem.

Plain x-rays are studies I order of the spine and pelvis. I am cautious about ordering special x-ray studies in children, but I will if necessary.

#### **Causes of Back Pain in Children**

These are the more common causes of back pain in children that I see.

- Kyphosis or round back caused by some wedging of the vertebrae
- Stress fracture – spondylolysis
- Slipped vertebra – Spondylolisthesis
- Infection – the most common cause in very young children. It can be in the bone or disc.
- Tumor in the bone or spinal cord

There are several more very unusual causes, but this list covers most of them.

## **Treatment**

In an article like this it is way too complicated to go into specifics. It would get too involved and confusing and I don't want to lose you.

Believe me, I do what ever is needed to diagnose and treat these children. I have no hesitation to make referrals when necessary.

They deserve the best treatment we can give them.

## **The Message**

Do not delay in getting the child evaluated.

Don't call it growing pains. If it lasts more than 2 days or is getting worse it must be seen. Don't wait.

You don't need to know how to evaluate or treat these problems. That is my job. Your job is to get help for them in a timely way.

*My patients put their trust in me and what I do improves the quality of their lives.*

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Dr. Haverbush