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Presented by Dr. Samila Hifai

Are Headaches Affecting Your Child's Academic Performance?

Has your child ever complained of a nagging headache? If so, he or she isn't alone. Research shows that headaches are as much of a problem for children as adults — not only because of the pain, but also because of the effect on a child's quality of life.

And, researchers in New Zealand have recently uncovered an association between headache and poor academic performance. Chiropractors, like Dr. Hifai, want parents to be aware of this growing crisis — and that chiropractic can help.

Childhood Headache Sufferers Do Worse in School

Scientists recently followed 971 people from birth until age 32. "Frequent childhood headaches were identified from parent report from ages 7 to 13 years, and data relating to cognitive and academic performance from ages 3 to 32 years were analyzed."

Although adults with tension-type headache did not score worse on cognitive tests than their headache-free peers, "a consistent relation was found between childhood headache (regardless of headache diagnosis in adulthood) and lower scores on most cognitive measures from age 3 years through adolescence (verbal and performance IQ, receptive language, and reading scores)." (*Curr Pain Headache Rep* 2007;11:454-60.)

Start of School Associated With Headache

Dr. Hifai explains to parents that it's particularly important to focus on preventing childhood headache during the start of the school year. Researchers found that youngsters with a history of head pain are likely to have episodes starting in September. One study, which enrolled more than 1,400 6- and 7-year-old children, revealed that

headache frequency increased by 20 percent during the first months of school. What's more, the students' headaches became more frequent as the year progressed.

"School start appears to increase the incidence of overall headache (occasional headache in particular) in children, independent of other factors," the study's authors explain (*Pediatrics* 1999;103:80).

Headaches Lead to Missing School

Painful headaches directly affect a student's ability to concentrate, listen and think. Worse yet, research documents another undeniable fact: Students with headaches miss more school than their headache-free peers.

A report published in the renowned *British Medical Journal* revealed that students with headaches and migraines miss twice the number of school days each year compared to students without head pain. The study, which enrolled 2,165 5- through 15-year-old students, revealed that migraines and tension-type headaches increase with age. The authors concluded, "Migraine is a common cause of headache in children and causes significantly reduced school attendance." (*BMJ* 1994;309:765-9.)

Hurts Social Interaction

Having friends is key to enjoying school and, in turn, excelling academically. Sadly, headaches may put a damper on a child's ability to seek out friends and maintain relationships.

Children who suffer from headaches are more apt to skip socializing and have trouble with peers and authority figures. These youngsters are also more likely to report feeling lethargic and reflect on morbid subjects (such as death) than pain-free youngsters (*Pediatrics* 2000;106:270-5).

Linked With Depression

Here's another health trend that may wreak havoc on your child's school performance: A growing percentage of youngsters are diagnosed each year with emotional depression. And this trend may be related to the escalating number of children suffering from head pain, say researchers who compared 128 6- to 18-year-old headache sufferers with 83 pain-free peers. Those with headaches often endured more psychological problems, such as despair and anxiety, than those in the pain-free control group (*Cephalalgia* 2003;23:206-13).



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In another study, a group of 100 3- to 17-year-old youths drew pictures to illustrate how their headaches made them feel. More than 30 percent of the children's illustrations disclosed emotions of helplessness, frustration and anger. More than 20 percent of the adolescents depicted themselves as dead, dying or about to be killed by their headaches (*Headache* 1996;36:224-30).

Skipped Sleep

For children and adults, sleep is vital for the rejuvenation of body, mind and spirit. For students, restless nights generate devastating effects on academic records. And current research shows that children with head pain are more likely to miss out on sleep, compared with headache-free youngsters.

In one late-breaking study, investigators assessed headaches in 118 children, ages 2 through 12. Headache sufferers were found to rest fewer hours, on average, than pain-free youths. Migraine frequency and duration were also linked to anxiety about sleeping, resisting bedtime and sleep disorders — such as sleepwalking, night terrors and bed-wetting (*Headache* 2003;43:362-8).

Extent of the Problem

Childhood head pain is often dismissed as “no big deal.” Yet doctors of chiropractic know that pediatric headaches are a rampant, global problem.

Researchers in Germany identified headache as the most common form of pain in children and adolescents. More than 1,000 students answered questions about pain location, intensity and duration. Eighty percent of respondents reported some sort of pain during the previous three months. The most prevalent type of pain was headaches; a whopping 57 percent suffered from head pain. More than 30 percent of the youths endured pain lasting longer than six months (*Schmerz* 2003;17:171-8).

Another analysis, which included 2,358 10- through 17-year-old youths

in the Netherlands, documented that pediatric headache frequency is on the rise. Investigators found that headache occurrence jumped by 6 percent since 1985. Specifically, headache prevalence doubled in elementary-aged school boys (*Eur J Pain* 2001;5:145-53).

Persistent Problem

If you think children grow out of headaches, think again. In one study, researchers surveyed more than 11,000 people at ages 7, 11, 16, 23 and 33. Headache-enduring youths were likely to suffer into adulthood and report physical and psychological problems (*BMJ* 2001;322:1145).

Chiropractic Addresses the Underlying Cause

Of course, your youngster can't opt out of school to avoid headaches; so this school year, vow to eradicate headaches before classes start. Rather than masking symptoms with over-the-counter (OTC) drugs, which are loaded with potential side effects, choose chiropractic care — a proven, all-natural solution for pediatric headaches.

Doctors of chiropractic focus on prevention. First, they gently and carefully examine a child's spine for **vertebral subluxations** — a common condition caused by misaligned vertebrae. Studies show vertebral subluxations in the spine of the neck (cervical spine) are a leading cause of headaches (*Wien Med Wochenschr* 1994;144:102-8). Fortunately, doctors of chiropractic eliminate vertebral subluxations through **chiropractic adjustments** — highly specialized and gentle maneuvers tailored to match a child's body size and spine.

Research Shows Chiropractic Beneficial

In a review of nine studies, which included approximately 700 patients with chronic headaches and migraines, chiropractic care was much more effective than other alternative therapies, such as massage. Additionally, chiropractic adjustments were as effective

as prescription medications for migraines and tension-type headaches, without the potential hazardous side effects of medication (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2001;24:457-66).

Another report enrolled 127 volunteers, ages 10 to 70, who endured at least one migraine per month. Participants received two months of chiropractic care, with a maximum of 16 chiropractic adjustments.

Compared with patients who did not receive adjustments, the chiropractic cohort significantly slashed its medication use and migraine frequency, intensity and duration. Specifically, 22 percent of the chiropractic patients enjoyed more than a 90 percent reduction in migraines. Approximately 50 percent more reported significant improvement in an episode's pain and duration (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2000;23:91-5).

Even if your child is headache-free, he or she may have spinal misalignments, which can exist prior to symptoms. You wouldn't wait for a painful cavity to see a dentist, so why put off chiropractic care? By correcting vertebral subluxations prior to the onset of pain, chiropractors ward off a multitude of problems, including hateful headaches and mind-numbing migraines.

Take a proactive approach and schedule an appointment today, before school begins.



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