Learning has become increasingly stressful and our kids have to make their life career choices much earlier nowadays. In this competitive environment it is easy to forget about the physical and emotional side of a child’s development leading to stress, anxiety and often a depression. Take the advantage of the young body’s natural need to move, and introduce various activities, allowing your kids to play, enjoy and benefit from physical activity.

Creating positive behaviour patterns from an early age will help your children to prepare for future life challenges and allow them to stay healthy and free of pain.

**The Importance of Posture**

Good posture is when our body maintains a balance with a minimal muscle effort. Assessing the posture as well as movements becomes a key tool that helps us discover if there are any health issues or abnormalities even before other symptoms like discomfort or pain start to develop. Proper posture is identified by looking from the front or back and imagining a line dividing the body in half. There should be a symmetry between the left and right side of that line. If you look from the side, when you drop a line from the top of the head it should go through the ear, shoulder, wrist, elbow, hip, knee and ankle.

There are some easy spot signs that indicate a poor posture.

- Forward head position in relation to upper body
- Hunched upper back
- Winging-sticking out shoulder blades
- Arched lower back and sticking out belly
- Inward knee ankle position
- In-toeing / pigeon walk

Please note that some of these posture patterns are normal gait variations in a child’s development and most of them should resolve by the age of 7-years. If they persist beyond the expected age range, are progressive or asymmetric, or if there is pain and functional issues then you should consider opinion from a specialist physiotherapist or GP.

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If you require any further advice or feel that you or your child would benefit from an assessment or treatment speak to us at KTB to book an appointment with a specialist physiotherapist.

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It is important to implement a proper, healthy diet, avoiding heavily processed and high sugar foods. Overweight or obese children are more likely to experience musculoskeletal discomfort, back or leg pain due to impaired mobility and repetitive overload of body tissues.

Did you know? A single can or bottle of soft drink may contain 135g of sugar - enough to take a child over their maximum recommended daily intake.

**Prolonged Screen Time**

The impact on physical and emotional development as a result of long hours in front of the screen is substantial. As a result, the amount of screen time children are exposed to should be kept to a minimum. Stationary positions in front of the TV and hunching over a tablet or phone for many hours a week make muscles weaker and more stiff as well as overloading the joints leading to pain and health problems. There is also a negative psychological impact due to chemical changes to a child’s brain as a result of long time spent in front of the screen. Young people can easily get addicted to gaming or watching TV, they lose interest in going out to play, and they become less active, increasing chances to gain weight and also develop other health problems.

Did you know? The advice from the National Institute for Health Care Excellence is that children should have TV-Free days, or have two-hour limits on the time spent in front of the screens.

**Physical Inactivity**

*Reverse the negative impact of long sitting at school*

Did you know? It is recommended that all children and young people should engage in moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity for at least 60 minutes every day.

Many Schools already offer an average of two hours of PE or other physical activities per week. However, we need to do more to encourage children to be active every day. It is important to incorporate flexibility games and exercises in your weekly routine along with regular sport activities.

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Some recent studies suggest that both a sedentary lifestyle and competitive sports could increase the risk of back pain in later life. Sports like football, cricket, rugby, dance or swimming are very important to build up strength, speed and coordination in “young athletes” but there is also a need for stretch and relaxation. This is often a neglected or just not fully addressed side of physical development during school PE lessons as well as after-school clubs and sport training sessions. There are different ways you can introduce stretches and improve flexibility depending on the child’s age and needs.

Older children and teenagers might choose a sport activity of their interest like for example hockey, swimming, gymnastics or dance adding just a few minutes of particular stretches at the end of the session. 5-10 minutes should be enough to cover the most important groups of muscles.

For little ones, it is often enough to change the position in which they play during the day. You can also promote good movement patterns for a particular task by placing toys in various places around your child to get a desired result.

School children might need a more direct approach by organizing activities with a ball or game in a park once or twice a week to keep them engaged and enjoy time spent with you.

It is important to encourage children to play on the floor in a deep squat position or draw as well as read when lying on their front, side or back. Those positions will keep their feet, knees, hips, pelvis and spine moving in a full range thus allowing muscles to stretch and relax.

Some infants and younger children choose W-sitting when playing on the floor. It happens due to lack of core strength and pelvis instability. If not corrected this may lead to hip and knee problems, muscle stiffness, joint pain and might also affect walking. Try to correct your child's position and encourage them to sit with “feet in front” or in “ring” sitting. It may take a while for your child to get used to the new position but after a few weeks it will begin to feel comfortable and easy.

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Our body was shaped by thousands of years of evolution and the way we look and move is determined by a natural adaptation process to Earth gravitation forces. We need to move and change our position constantly in order to keep all the organs and systems forming our body functioning properly. The world around us is changing and so is our lifestyle. Being less active and staying too long in one position has a profound impact on our health. We need to learn how to counterbalance the negative influence of sedentary lifestyle in order to stay in active and pain free for as long as possible.

Very often a posture and gait retraining, muscle strengthening and stretching programme will be enough to restore the balance preventing something that might just be a bad habit from turning into an illness. Allow your children to walk, run and climb bare feet in a safe way. This will enable better foot development and helps maintain proper shock absorbing and braking function crucial for walking and running. Walking on grass, sand and pebble stones keeps foot muscles working and joints moving properly. You can also have fun at home joining the competition of picking marbles, Lego blocks or other small objects using feet only with your child and see who will be faster. If bare feet walking is not possible, try to use minimal sole shoes, flip flops, sandals with enough space for toes and flexible sole. Do not worry that lack of cushioning will harm your feet. In fact it will make them stronger!

Dedicate some time to observe how you and your children behave, move and what positions you spend most time in throughout the day.

Everyone should be able to touch their feet without bending knees or squat without lifting heels of the floor - can your child do this? Can you?

Stretching can be difficult but when arranged with games it may become good fun for the whole family!

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