



GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

It is acknowledged that student health is primarily a personal and family responsibility, and what students carry in their school bags is often a matter of student choice. The following guidelines are provided to assist school communities to work together over time to create a physical and working environment, which is supportive of student spinal health.

POSTURE

Research shows that up to 25% of any school class will be suffering low back pain or neck pain at any one time. This may be related to posture.

- Students should be encouraged to stand and sit well, and to be responsible for their own bodies. Students who regularly report neck pain or headaches should be encouraged to pursue eye sight testing to rule out potential causes.
 - Young people should be encouraged to stand tall, with shoulders aligned over hips, and with weight evenly over both feet.
 - When sitting, young people should be encouraged to use the back support of their chair, with their feet resting on the ground.
- It is possible that school seating may be too small for some students, and too large for others. Where possible the purchase of different sizes of furniture should be encouraged and classrooms should try to offer a choice of furniture in classrooms where a range of year groups work.
 - Furniture should be purchased with the end-use in mind. Tables and benches at which students will be required to sit should have sufficient leg space underneath to allow the student to sit in a forward facing, symmetrical posture.
 - School room lighting should enable young people sitting at the back of the room to view objects at the front of the room with ease. Be wary of the influence of glare from direct sunlight, or reflected off shiny surfaces (i.e. computer screens). Teachers should be sensitive to the potential effects of glare throughout the school day. Glare can cause students' eye strain, headaches and awkward postures whilst at their desks.

COMPUTING

Spinal health should be a consideration in computer setup and use.

- When using desk top computers young people should be encouraged to place the keyboard at elbow height whilst sitting in an upright posture.
- The top of the screen should be at eye level.
 - When using computer mouse devices the elbow should be kept in by the side of the body and the mouse kept as close to the body as possible.
- The screen should be maintained at a distance of approximately 50-60 cm from the eyes.
 - Young people should be encouraged to plan work away from the computer, to minimise time spent at the computer console.
 - When using a properly set up desk mounted personal computer (PC), young people should be encouraged to have five minutes break every hour. During these breaks they should be encouraged to leave the desk and move around.

Prolonged use of laptops is not ideal for the spinal health of students. Their usefulness is often restricted by screens that are too small or badly lit, and keyboards that are not appropriately sized. Regular use of laptops requires attention to the correct height of desks and chairs (to address the issues raised above), and to the arrangement of power cords for occupational health and safety reasons.

- When using laptop computers for extended periods of time, young people should be encouraged to have five minute breaks every 30 minutes of constant computer use. During these breaks young people should be encouraged to leave the desk and move around. It is also good practice to move the shoulders, arms and head to relieve postural tension.
- When selecting laptops for young people choose the lightest, and the one with the largest screen.
- With the high use of computers in the home environment students should be educated in the importance of correct workstation setup both at home and at school.

Supporting school communities to become spinal health promoting environments