



National Health
Promotion Program

Healthy Spines at Middle Park Primary

By Dr Janske Olde-Wolbers BSc (clin), BSc (chiro), Healthy Spines Team Member

As a new graduate, it is easy to get caught up in 'the practice' and not get out into the community to educate people about spinal health.

Fears of 'not being good enough', 'not knowing anything' and 'being scared of talking in public' can contribute to self imposed isolation. When I heard about the Healthy Spines Program, I knew this would help me 'get out there' and push me to grow in an important aspect of my career. In a word, the program has been fantastic.

The organisers and staff have put together an exceptionally professional and thorough program, making it easy for a busy chiropractor and school to put into place. Everything has been thought through, with a wonderful support network, making it a seamless process that is honed and refined all the time – a must for any new graduate!

The following is an article that I wrote for the local paper about Healthy Spines and my experience teaching 50 kids from two Year 3 and 4 classes at Middle Park Primary School.

What is the most important system in your body?

It is something you cannot replace. It generates enough electricity to power a light globe. There are more cells in this system than there are stars in the Milky Way. If these cells were placed end to end, they would stretch for over 1000kms – and this system is vital to life.

If you said the brain and nervous system, you were spot on.

The nervous system is a wonderfully complex and important part of our bodies that needs to be looked after. So why don't we get taught about how to look after it better? We learn a lot about dental hygiene, good diet, and the importance of exercise, but little if anything on posture and ergonomics whilst standing, sitting and sleeping in order to maintain good spinal health.

This deficiency in our education is exactly why the National Healthy Spines Health Promotion Program has been set up. The Healthy

Spines Program is a community service initiative funded by the Chiropractors' Association of Australia (CAA) to promote spinal health to school children in grades 3, 4 and 5.

Research in the 1990's demonstrated that many spinal problems facing adolescents and adults can be linked to poor spinal health in childhood. The CAA and the volunteer chiropractors involved in the program recognise and understand the importance of educating children about spinal health and that prevention is far more effective than cure.

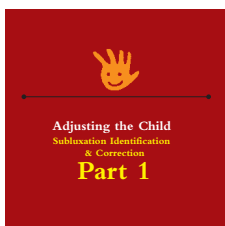
Middle Park Primary School also understands the importance of such a program and has embraced it with enthusiasm. The program is designed to be integrated into the existing school curriculum and is run over four sessions. The kids learn how to personally look after their spines through correct posture, bag carrying habits, desk ergonomics, stretching and exercise and why it is important to do so.

The children investigate the school's environment and policies and evaluate how well these areas support spinal health promotion, with the aim of improving these areas within the school and sharing this with the wider school community.

After the first session I immediately received great feedback from the parents, who commented that the kids were raving about the model spines they made out of pipe cleaners, string and Lego and their chance to look at and touch a model of a real spine. They were also telling everyone at home to sit up and stand properly! This was a great response to the initial session and I look forward to future meetings together.

For information on how to get involved in the Healthy Spines Program contact Leanne Jenkins at the CAA National Office: nhq@caa.asn.au or phone (02) 4731 8011. More information on Healthy Spines is available at www.healthyspines.com.au where you can download copies of the 2004 Evaluation Report from the Healthy Spines Research section.

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