**Orthopaedic Connection**

**Back Pain In Children Can Be Serious**

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. How to evaluate and treat it is well known and takes many forms.

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 and x-rays we would usually have them seen by a Physical Therapist for an exercise program and they get better. MRI would not be routine, but there may be an indication depending on the situation.

**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 studies are ordered of the spine and pelvis.

**Causes of Back Pain in Children**
- These are the more common causes of back pain in children.
  - 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. It is rare, but must always be considered.

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.
At the office we do what ever is needed to diagnose and treat these children. There is 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 the child must be seen. Don’t wait.
You don’t need to know how to evaluate or treat these problems. That is our 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.

Gratiot County Herald Archive and Office Website.
I sincerely appreciate all of you loyal readers and patients present and future and welcome all newcomers!
Besides what you read today there is a huge treasure trove of Orthopaedic and musculoskeletal information at www.orthopodsurgeon.com. It contains the Website Library, Your Orthopaedic Connection and complete archive of every GCH article I have written.
I specialize in you. Be well.
315 Warwick Drive
Alma, Michigan 48801
Phone 989-463-6092 for an appointment.

Dr. Haverbush