

HEALTHY LIVING



Prevent Video Game Injuries

Injuries from physical play and sports are common throughout childhood and adolescence, but with the growing popularity of video games, some children now experience the same types of aches and pains that their parents get from sitting at a desk all day at work. Taking steps to help kids prevent common gaming injuries can reduce pain today and potentially reduce the risk of long-term damage.

According to Scott Bautch, DC, president of the American Chiropractic Association's (ACA) Council on Occupational Health, common musculoskeletal issues caused by hours of gaming in front of a screen stem mainly from lack of movement and postural stresses. Common complaints among gamers include eye strain, wrist, arm/elbow and hand/thumb strain, classic carpal tunnel syndrome, and upper back and neck pain.

While some gaming systems do encourage movement (and can potentially cause injuries, too), the sedentary reality of gaming is what concerns chiropractors like Dr. Bautch. "Joints live by motion," he says. "They get their nutrition through movement." To offset the lack of movement and postural stresses associated with gaming, Dr. Bautch suggests making some adjustments:

Moderation

Limiting video game time is a good way to offset potential musculoskeletal problems. Dr. Bautch recommends starting early with limits on screen time so that by the time kids become teenagers, boundaries are understood. Don't think they can regulate themselves. While the age and specific circumstances of a child influence what limitations are appropriate, Dr. Bautch advises older kids to take at least a two-hour break after two hours of play. He also encourages physical activities and face-to-face time with friends to balance the sedentary and sometimes solitary gaming experience.

Ergonomics

To reduce the chance of injury, Dr. Bautch suggests making the gaming environment as ergonomic as possible. Begin by ensuring the screen is at eye level, so necks don't have to bend too far up or down. Whether kids sit or stand while playing, encourage them to keep their bodies in a "neutral" position, which means muscles shouldn't be too contracted or too extended. If sitting, try using a chair that has back support as well as cushioned arm rests. Strive to keep the body aligned: ears over shoulders and shoulders over hips.

Movement

During a play session, Dr. Bautch suggests gamers take a 15 second "micro-break" every 15 minutes. During this time, they should take their eyes off the screen and stretch and lengthen whatever has been bent (like an elbow) and bend whatever has been straight (such as legs if they have been standing). Stretch hands, fingers and wrists in the opposite direction that they have been used. If kids lean their shoulders forward while playing, encourage them to do a gentle stretch backward, pushing their shoulder blades together. Dr. Bautch says sitting on a gym ball while playing video games can also encourage small movements as a player shifts to maintain balance.

For more information on prevention and wellness, or to find an ACA chiropractor near you, visit www.HandsDownBetter.org



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