Crashes, bumps, jolts, and falls are the hazards of growing up. Children are subjected to these small and sometimes large traumas through play, sports, learning to walk, learning to ride a bike, and involvement in car accidents. Even birth complicated by breach positioning, vacuum extraction, or the use of forceps is also a potential source of early trauma to the spine. It is not surprising then that children are not exempt from experiencing spinal problems. A recent nation wide study in Finland found that 26% of boys and 33% of girls (children and adolescents) experienced chronic back pain. Chronic pain was defined as pain interfering with schoolwork or leisure activities for 12 months. A large survey of 1,178 school children found that 51.2% had experienced spinal pain at some time, with low back, and upper back pain being the most common forms.

Low back pain is even more common among adolescent athletes. Excessive stress on the spine that can accompany many sporting activities (e.g. gymnastics, hockey) increases the risk for low back injuries during the growth spurt and can be harmful to the lower back.

Risk factors for childhood back pain include age (more prevalent during teenage years), previous back injury, gender (females are at higher risk), volleyball playing, smoking, and time spent watching T.V. Risk factors for the development of low back pain in adulthood include low back pain occurring during the adolescent growth spurt and a family history of low back pain.

Most of the time, spinal problems are not the result of one event, but the accumulation of events added together over a period of time. These accumulated stresses can lead to abnormal postures and spinal alignment, abnormal spinal joint motion, and abnormal muscle balance. If these structural changes become severe enough to compress, stretch, or inflame the spinal tissues, then the nerves supplying these tissues become irritated, and produce symptoms. Symptoms of spinal problems include pain, limitation of motion, point tenderness, swelling, redness, and neurological changes (numbness, tingling, changes in skin temperature). Older children can tell you what is hurting or not feeling normal, but infants may only be able to show their discomfort through crying and irritable behaviour. Symptoms should not be taken lightly.

Chiropractic provides a drug and surgery free approach to restoring and maintaining good spinal health at any age. We focus on restoring normal spinal alignment and motion, and normal muscle balance. Prevention of spinal problems is emphasized through lifestyle modifications (nutrition, body and posture awareness, and physical conditioning). It is much easier to prevent problems than to fix them, and like most other health care disciplines, periodic spinal check-ups are recommended for children as well as adults.

**Healthy Tip:**
Relax and enjoy the moment. Studies show that people who perceive themselves to be under a great deal of stress are three times more likely to catch a cold compared to those that are optimistic and relaxed. Stress may hamper the immune system response, increasing the likelihood of illness.