

## **Back to School**

Here are a few thoughts that may help the return to school be a little safer and easier on our academic athletes.

One thought is that we need to ensure that students who travel with a backpack do so in a safe manner. Often we see students with his or her backpacks slung over one shoulder – using only one of the straps. The majority of backpacks come equipped with two straps, which helps to distribute the weight evenly on both shoulders, thus reducing the risk of a shoulder or neck strain. When shopping for a backpack, look for one with wide shoulder straps and preferably a pack with both a chest strap and waist strap – both of which help to distribute the weight.

New shoes are another back-to-school ritual. As parents, we often give consideration to the fact that our children are still growing and will buy shoes that are a size too large to accommodate the growth spurt that we know they will have over the course of the school year. The problem with this is that ill-fitting footwear can cause foot issues, which can lead to other problems like knee pain. We must keep in mind that these are active feet that we are shoe-ing, so let's keep them happy. Literature indicates that laces are better than Velcro for snugness and proper fit (if you can convince your child to tie their laces). Check to ensure that the back of the shoe (heel cup) is firm and will support your child's heel; this can be done by squeezing it between your fingers, it should be firm and not fold or bend too easy. The rule of thumb for shoe fitting is that you should be able to get approximately 1 thumb in between the heel and back of the shoe with the toes comfortably in front of the shoe.

Once our children get into the swing of things and homework starts, we need to ensure they have a safe and ergonomically sound place to do their work.

The computer is often involved in school projects. We must remember that a properly set up computer station for us adults doesn't mean that its right for our children, so take a minute and help your child adjust the chair so that his/her knees are at a 90-degree angle with their feet flat on the floor. There needs to be support for the lower back in the form of a cushion or a contoured seat back. Elbows and wrists need to be supported.

Have a great school year and stay well.

-Doug Treloar, Physiotherapist