

Vacationing 101

As the school year winds down, our thoughts shift into planning for summer holidays and vacation. The perennial issue of how to keep the kids busy through the summer is a quandary that parents face. Technology has fortunately or unfortunately assisted in keeping kids busy. With the advent of the computer and various videogames, kids are often engulfed for hours.

In a recent information release from the Canadian Academy of Manipulative Therapy (an association of skilled physiotherapists with extensive post-graduate education) it noted that its members have noticed an increase in children with cervical (neck) tension headaches.

These are the most common form of headaches and are usually preventable. It is believed that these headaches are related to poor posture and head positioning. These poor postures are easily adopted by children (and some adults) as they play and watch the screens. Not only are kids at risk, so too are adults who spend countless hours in front of a computer screen.

A more recent evil technology is the ceiling mounted DVD screens that are found in most new minivans. Long ago was the time in which we amused ourselves on long road trips with etch-a-sketches, "Eye Spy" or fighting with siblings.

While these video players are a god-send to most parents, they can be detrimental to your child's health in that they can cause neck and eye strain. Think about this for a minute or look in your rearview mirror and look at the position of the passenger's neck and eyes as they watch the movie. Given that the screen is in the middle of the vehicle and generally the passengers sit off to either side, this causes the passengers to have to turn their necks either right or left as well as having to look up in order to see the screen. Their eyes are also looking up and to the left or right. These positions are held for prolonged periods (most movies are approximately two hours long) and these sustained postures can lead to sore necks, eye strain and headaches. This is unfortunately occurring in our children.

As mentioned earlier, these neck strains and headaches are generally preventable and we know what an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure. Prevention can take the form of encouraging kids to take frequent breaks from the computer or video games get them outside participating in physical exercise.

With regards to the movies in the van issue, have your passenger change seats every half hour, this allows for a break in the posture and even out the stresses by having them spend equal time looking in each direction.

For the students or adults on the computer take time to get up and get away from the computer, set a timer to remind you to do so. Perhaps a bright sticky dot on the top edge of the monitor will remind you to sit tall and correct posture. Looking after how you hold your head can help to minimize neck pain and headaches.

Have a great trip – stay well!

-Doug Treloar, Physiotherapist