

Backpack Safety Tips

Did You Know....

- More than 40 million students in the United States carry school backpacks, the average weighing almost one-fourth to one-third of their body weight, at least once a week.
- In one study, 6 out of 10 students ages 9-20 reported chronic back pain related to heavy backpacks. Only 2 in 10 reported pain of those carrying backpacks weighing 15% or less of their body weight.

To prevent injuries to muscles and joints, which can lead to severe back, neck, and shoulder pain, choose the right backpack with the following:

- Two wide, padded shoulder straps: Narrow straps can dig into shoulders causing pain and restrict circulation. Using

only one strap cannot distribute weight evenly, causing muscle strain.

- Waist strap: to distribute the weight of a heavy load more evenly.
- Lightweight backpack: so it doesn't increase the weight of the load.
- Rolling backpack: this may be a good choice for students who need to tote a heavy load (remember that rolling packs must be carried up stairs).

Remember to:

- Keep straps tight to keep the load close to the body, holding the pack two inches above the waist.
- A loaded backpack should never weigh more than 20% of the body weight (suggested is 15% or less). Place heavier items close to the center of the back, using all of the compartments to distribute

weight evenly.

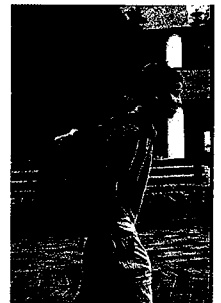
- Don't carry all the books if you don't need to; use your locker.
- Don't bend over. Squat, using both knees and keep back in its normal inward curve.
- If you have to lean forward to carry the back pack, it is too heavy!

References:

www.backpacksafe.com
www.orthoinfo.aaos.org



The RIGHT way



The WRONG way

Lighten it Up

With so much pressure on schools to educate children about far more than the traditional academic subjects, learn what you can do to reduce backpack loads to the recommended 15% or less of a child's weight.

- Consider lightweight alternatives to recommended school supplies. Allow students to use spiral bound or composition books and pocket folders for note taking and organization rather than three-ring binders,

and to divide class materials between two 1-inch binders rather than carry a large 2 or 3 inch binder.

- Take into consideration the total weight of each day's class work – not only in educational content, but also in terms of textbook weight.
- Look into alternate methods of providing course information if your school has the resources to implement them, such as

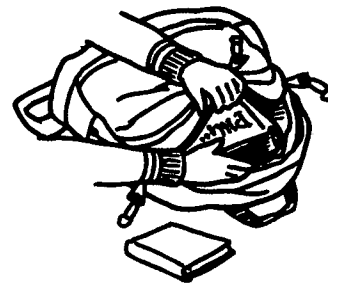
posting study guides and subject information online to be read and reviewed, handing out photocopied homework and review chapters, or providing duplicate textbooks.

- Clarify the due dates of all assignments and student work reviews.
- And lastly, ask children what suggestion they have for lightening their backpack loads.

Backpack Safety Tips

“What can I do if my child is complaining of back or neck pain and I suspect it’s from the backpack?”

- Never let a child carry more than 15% of his or her body weight. This means a child who weighs 100 pounds shouldn't wear a loaded school backpack heavier than 15 pounds.
- Load heaviest items closest to the child's back (the back of the pack).
- Arrange books and materials so they won't slide around in the backpack.
- Check what your child carries to school and brings home. Make sure the items are necessary to the day's activities.
- On days the backpack is too loaded, your child can hand carry a book or other item.
- If the backpack is too heavy, consider using a book bag on wheels if your child's school allows it.



Content and Photos courtesy of The American Occupational Therapy Association.

Wearing a Backpack



- Both shoulder straps should always be worn. Wearing a pack slung over one shoulder can cause a child to lean to one side, curving the spine and causing pain or discomfort.
- Adjust the shoulder straps so that the pack fits snugly to the child's back.
- A pack that hangs loosely from the back can pull the child backwards and strain muscles.
- Wear the waist belt if the backpack has one. This helps distribute the pack's weight more evenly. The bottom of the pack should rest in the curve of the lower back. It should never rest

more than four inches below the child's waistline.



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