



Is Your Child's Backpack Making the Grade?

While backpacks are one of the most convenient ways to carry books and school supplies, an overloaded or improperly worn backpack gets a failing grade, according to the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA). Overloaded backpacks carried by children compromise their posture and may lead to future injuries of the spine.

Here are some tips to keep your children healthy and happy as they return to school:



Wrong
Strap on only
one shoulder



Correct
Wide, padded straps on both
shoulders



Wrong
Load too heavy



Correct
Load no more than
10-15% of body weight

✓ **Wear both straps.** Use of one strap causes one side of the body to bear the weight of the backpack. By wearing two shoulder straps, the weight of the backpack is better distributed.

✓ **Wear the backpack over the strongest mid-back muscles.** Pay close attention to the way the backpack is positioned on the back. It should rest evenly in the middle of the back. Shoulder straps should be adjusted to allow the child to put on and take off the backpack without difficulty and allow free movement of the arms. Straps should not be too loose, and the backpack should not extend below the low back.

✓ **Lighten the load.** Keep the load at 10-15% or less of the child's bodyweight. Carry only those items that are required for the day. Organize the contents of the backpack by placing the heaviest items closest to the back.

✓ **When selecting a new backpack,** choose ergonomically designed features that enhance safety and comfort:

- ◆ A padded back to reduce pressure on the back, shoulders and under arm regions, and to enhance comfort;
- ◆ Hip and chest belts to transfer some of the backpack weight from the back & shoulders to the hips & torso;
- ◆ Multiple compartments to better distribute weight, keep items secure, and ease access to the contents;
- ◆ Compression straps on the sides or bottom of the backpack to stabilize the articles and compress the contents so that the items are as close to the back as possible and;
- ◆ Reflective material to enhance visibility of the child to drivers at night.

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