

Don't Let Backpacks Get You Down

When used correctly, backpacks are the best way to carry heavy loads, especially for long periods of time. A backpack is designed to put the weight on the strongest muscles in the body, the back and abdomen. Even so, 5,500 Americans are treated annually for backpack-related back injuries—64 percent of them are children.*

In today's schools, backpacks are a mainstay of the student population, with many children carrying all of their books and supplies all day. To ensure that students' use of backpacks is appropriate and safe, follow these guidelines:

WEIGHT

Backpacks should not weigh more than 10 percent to 15 percent of the child's body weight. This means a child who weighs 100 pounds should have a backpack weighing no more than 10 to 15 pounds. If a child needs to lean forward to support the weight of his backpack, the backpack is too heavy. Backpacks with wheels and handles may be a solution for a child who needs to carry more than 15 percent of his body weight.

WEARING A BACKPACK

When choosing a backpack, pick one made of lightweight material, such as canvas or nylon. Take time to choose the correct size of backpack for the child's body.

Straps should be wide and padded. Children always should wear both straps over their shoulders and a waist strap, if provided. Adjust the straps so that the backpack rests in the middle of the child's back.

PACKING A BACKPACK

Always pack the backpack with the most weight lower on the back, near the waist and with the heaviest books closest to the body. Instead of leaning over, the child should bend the knees to pick up a backpack.

Children should clean their backpacks regularly to remove unnecessary items. At school, students should make frequent locker stops to lighten the load.

COMMUNICATION

Communication among parents, students and teachers helps avoid problems. For example, if a child is having back problems and has a particularly heavy book, parents can request that a second book be issued to keep at home.

Encourage children to tell you if they experience symptoms of back, shoulder or neck pain, numbness or tingling.

*U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

This is general information and is not specific medical advice. Always consult with a doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns about the health of a child.

As a not-for-profit organization, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta produces materials in-house using the most cost-efficient paper and printing techniques.