

Backpack Safety Tips

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Backpacks or book bags are essential for all kids, teenagers and young adults returning to school this year, just as a brief case is for the business executive. As a result, buying, loading, and carrying one is an afterthought for most. But backpacks can be a source of aches and pain. From carrying too much weight in it to tripping over one, injuries can occur in your back, shoulder, hand and wrist.

With this in mind, here are a few tips to think about this school year:

- **Choose the right backpack.** It's common for students and parents to select the cheapest backpack because they're "all the same." Wrong.

Features to look for in a backpack include:

- Number of straps – Two straps are most common and allow students to strap the backpack over each shoulder, ensuring even weight distribution.
 - Padded straps and back – Padded backpacks provide more comfort and alleviate stress and strain on the shoulders and back.
 - Light weight – Lighter bags cause less stress on the back.
 - Wheels – More students are using a handle and wheels to carry their bags behind them, as many do with luggage. This avoids stress and strain from carrying and lifting the bag. However, it can be inconvenient in the snow, walking up stairs, and fitting in a locker.
- **Don't overload it.** Students have a tendency to cram as many books, papers and other school supplies in their backpacks as possible. Laptops, too. Too much weight over time can cause significant stress on your shoulders and back. And for smaller children, an overloaded backpack can cause them to lose their balance and fall.

A good rule of thumb is to keep your backpack at 10 percent or less of your body weight. To alleviate the load, students can carry a book or two in their arms.

- **Be cautious lifting it.** As you do with any object, use your legs and keep your back straight when lifting your backpack to put over your shoulders. Parents should help small children, especially with heavier bags.
- **Carry it properly.** Place both straps over each shoulder to balance the load and avoid using just one strap, which places all pressure on one shoulder. Some newer backpack models have only a sling that straps across the chest. This can cause stress on the shoulders, neck, and back.

Some bags include a waist strap, which helps direct the load to the stronger waist and hip muscle groups.

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