

Pack it light. Wear it right.

Hauling a heavy backpack can result in poor posture and even distort the spinal column.



Use these tips to correctly choose, pack, lift and carry a backpack:

Choose the right backpack.

Pack it light.

Secure it tight.

Backpacks have become an essential item on every child's back-to-school list. But even though backpacks are practical, they can strain muscles and joints and cause back pain if they're too heavy or worn incorrectly. To understand how heavy backpacks can cause injuries, it helps to understand how they affect your body. When a heavy weight like a backpack filled with books is incorrectly placed on the shoulders, the weight can pull you backward. To compensate, you often bend forward at the hips or arch the back, which can cause the spine to compress unnaturally. Putting this kind of stress and strain on your body daily can, over time, lead to shoulder, neck and back pain.

Luckily, following a few simple guidelines can help to avoid this type of back pain. These guidelines also apply to adults using backpacks, so be a good role model and show your kids how it's done right!

Backpack Facts

- In one study, 6 out of 10 students ages 9 to 20 reported chronic back pain related to heavy backpacks.
- More than 7000 emergency room visits in 2001 were related to backpacks and book bags. Approximately half of those injuries occurred in children 5 to 14 years old.
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Some signs that your child's backpack is too heavy

- Your child complains of headaches, back / neck ache or shoulder pain during the week but not on weekends.
- Your child has red marks or creases on shoulders
- Your child complains of tingling or numbness in arms or hands
- Your child has to lean forward or sideways to remain balanced while wearing the backpack.

Selecting the right backpack

- **Size:** Select the proper size backpack for your child's back. It should not extend above the top of the shoulder, or below the top of the hipbone.
- **Weight:** Never let a child carry more than 10 to 15 percent of his or her body weight.
- **Material:** The most back-friendly backpacks are made of lightweight materials such as vinyl or canvas.
- **Comfort:** A backpack should have a padded back for extra comfort and protection. The backpack should also have well-padded shoulder straps as well as a hip strap to ease pressure on the shoulders and neck, which can result in tingling and pain.
- **Pockets:** **Choose a backpack that has several pockets instead of one large compartment. This will help to distribute weight and keep the contents from shifting.**

Putting on your backpack

Start by placing your backpack on a table or chair. Then bend at the knees and lift with the legs, putting on one shoulder strap at a time.

Wearing your backpack

- **Packing:** The heaviest items should be loaded closest to the back. Position books and other materials in a way that prevents them from sliding. Pack any sharp items towards the front so they won't dig into the back.
- **Shoulder Straps:** Always wear both shoulder straps. Wearing only one backpack strap can cause a child to lean to one side, curving the spine and causing discomfort or pain.
- **Hip Straps:** Use a waist belt or hip strap helps to take the weight off the shoulders and spine, and distribute it more evenly onto the pelvis and legs.