

Children's Health

Backpack Safety: What Parents Need To Know

(NAPSA)—While most parents tend to concentrate on what's going into their youngsters' brains while at school, it may be a good idea to give some thought to what's going on the kids' backs on the way to and from school.

Backpacks are a popular and practical way for children and teenagers to carry schoolbooks and supplies. They're designed to distribute the weight of the load among some of the body's strongest muscles. When used correctly, backpacks can be a good way to carry the necessities of the school day.

According to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, improperly used backpacks may injure muscles and joints. This can lead to severe back, neck, and shoulder pain, as well as posture problems. Moreover, backpacks that are too heavy or are worn incorrectly can cause serious, sometimes lasting, musculoskeletal problems for children and teenagers. Experts recommend that children carry no more than 10 to 20 percent of their body weight. It is a myth, however, that heavy backpacks will cause scoliosis, a sideways curve of the spine that often shows up in adolescence.

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, in 2010, nearly 28,000 people were treated in hospitals, doctors' offices, and emergency rooms for backpack-related injuries like strains, sprains, dislocations and fractures.

Choosing the Right Backpack

To help your family use backpacks safely, consider these tips.

When choosing a backpack, look for some of the following features:

- Wide, padded shoulder straps
- Two shoulder straps
- Padded back



The correct use of both of the wide, well-padded shoulder straps will help distribute the weight of the backpack.

- Waist strap
- Lightweight

Injury Prevention

To prevent injury:

- Always use both shoulder straps.
- Tighten shoulder straps so that the backpack weight is distributed properly.
- Lift properly, with knees and abdominal muscles.
- Pack light and urge your child to pack only essential items and books.

What Else You Can Do

Parents should encourage their children to report any discomfort that may be caused by a heavy backpack.

You may even want to talk to the school about lightening the load and letting students stop at their lockers throughout the day.

If your child has back pain that does not improve, consider getting a second set of textbooks to keep at home.

Learn More

You can learn more about backpack safety from the experts at the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, who would rather prevent than treat injuries sustained from heavy backpack lifting. They can be reached at www.ortho.org and (800) 346-2267.