

PACK IT LIGHT. WEAR IT RIGHT.

CHOOSING A BACKPACK

Choose a backpack that is proportionate to body size. The top of the backpack should not extend higher than the top of the shoulder and the bottom should not fall below the top of the hipbone.

Select a backpack made of a sturdy, lightweight material (vinyl or canvas instead of leather).

The shoulder straps should be at least two inches wide, adjustable, and padded. Ensure that they do not cut into or fit too snugly around the arms and arm pits. Poorly designed shoulder straps can dig deep into the muscles and put strain on the nerves.

A backpack should have a padded back for added protection and comfort.

A hip strap or waist belt helps to effectively redistribute as much as 50 to 70 percent of the weight off the shoulders and spine onto the pelvis, equalizing the strain on the bones, joints and muscles.



Choose a backpack that has several individual pockets instead of one large compartment, this will help to distribute the weight evenly and keep contents from shifting.

PACKING A BACKPACK

Backpacks should never exceed 15 percent of a child's body weight (i.e.: a 90-pound child should not carry more than 14 pounds in a backpack). For elementary school children try to keep the weight in their packs below 10 percent of their body weight.

Ensure that the weight is evenly distributed in the backpack.

Pack the heaviest items closest to the body; this reduces the strain as the weight is closer to the body's own centre of gravity.

Don't overload the backpack; only carry the items that are needed.

Pack the odd-shaped items on the outside, so they don't dig into the back. Remember to always "Pack it light. Wear it right!"

LIFTING A BACKPACK

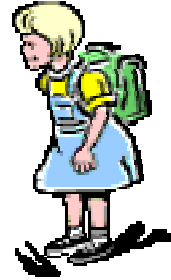
If no one is available to give a helping hand, squat or kneel to pick up the backpack and place it on a counter, chair or table at waist height, before slipping it on.

Avoid twisting when lifting.

Use both hands to check the weight of the backpack.

Lift with the legs, bending at the knees and put on one shoulder strap at a time.

Adjust straps to fit the body.



CARRYING A BACKPACK

Slinging the backpack on one side can cause stress on the joints and muscles in the mid and lower back.

Wear both straps and adjust them so that the pack fits snugly to the body and it doesn't dangle loosely to the side.



You should be able to slide the flat of your hand between the backpack and your back.

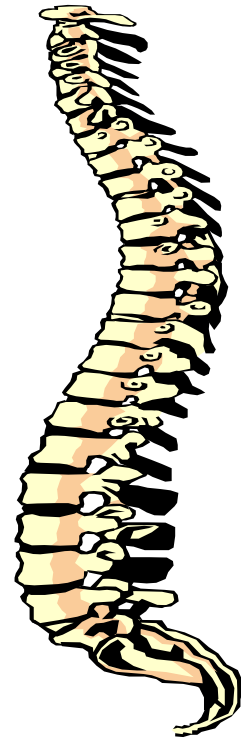
By using the waist strap it reduces the strain on your back and transfers some of the load to your hips.

A backpack that is too heavy or too low will cause you to lean forward and carry the full weight on the upper back.

HOW YOUR CHILD'S SPINE WORKS

A recent poll conducted in Ontario found that 76% of chiropractors in the province agree that “overloaded backpacks are a leading cause of back and neck pain in many of their school aged patients.” Once the drastic nature of this latest phenomenon involving overly-stuffed backpacks and improper carrying practices reached the Ontario Chiropractic Association, the profession agreed something had to be done. And as with many other concerns, the first place to start was education.

You need only watch how students struggle while they walk with an overloaded backpack to understand the potential health risks to their backs and spines. Hauling heavy backpacks on a continual basis can cause stress to the growing spinal column, which could lead to a lifetime of pain and health problems. A heavy backpack carried on the back can injure the neck, shoulder, back, cause numbness in the arms and reduce blood flow to the surrounding muscles and tissues. Poor posture can be created by encouraging the carrier to lean forward, reducing their ability to maintain balance and restrict movement. Muscle strain and an irritation of the spine, joints and muscles can result from the distortion of the natural curves of the spine. The shoulders can become rounded and the resulting stress on neck muscles can lead to headaches and neck pain.



If the back pack is carried only on one shoulder, muscle strain will result due to the muscles being forced to compensate for the uneven weight. The spine is also forced to lean towards the opposite side of the load thereby placing stress on the middle and lower backs. This may increase the likelihood of back problems later in life.

Research has shown that by the end of the teen years, more than 50% of youth experience at least one low back pain episode. Magnetic resonance imaging studies have shown that backpacks alter the fluid filled content of the discs in the spine creating a risk factor for disc herniations (“slipped disc”) and osteoarthritis later in life. It’s hard enough growing up these days, so let’s see if we can’t make things a little easier for our children. Chiropractors play an important role in providing preventative education and early detection as well as providing chiropractic care in the treatment of backpack-related injuries. Pack them light, wear them right, and have your child checked for problems today!