



Backpacks: Helpful and Harmful?

Kids from pre-school through graduate school carry backpacks to class every day. They hold books, clothes, school supplies and lunches. While backpacks are a necessity, they may not be healthy for a student's spine and muscles.

Heavy backpacks cause

- strained muscles,
- curvature of the spine, and
- back and shoulder pain and discomfort.

If heavy backpacks are worn over one shoulder, children actually walk and stand differently.

Help your child avoid muscle and spinal problems.

- Choose a backpack with wide, padded shoulder straps and padding on the back.

- Teach backpack safety. Always use both shoulder straps. Never allow your child to wear the backpack over one shoulder. The backpack should never weigh more than 10 to 20 % of the student's body weight. For example, if your child weighs 60 pounds, her backpack should weigh 12 pounds or less. Use a bathroom scale to weigh the backpack.
- Pack the backpack as light as possible. Use all compartments to pack books and supplies. Pack heavier items closest to the center of the backpack.
- Do not assume that if your child does not complain, his backpack is not hurting him. Young children often do not complain of pain. Watch for signs of discomfort. Ask if she has pain.

Also, encourage your child to use school time wisely. This reduces the need to bring all his books home.

Call the Parent Help Line. We listen. We can find you help.
1-217-544-5808 or 1-888-727-5889 from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. , 7 days a week.