

Backpacks can be a safe way to carry heavy loads



Children'sSM
Healthcare of Atlanta

If children and teens wear them the right way

When backpacks are used correctly, your child should be able to carry his books and supplies without causing problems to his neck, shoulders and back.

What kind of backpack should my child use?

Choose a backpack made of light material, such as canvas or nylon. Be sure it is the right size for your child.

Look for:

- Wide, padded shoulder straps
- Padded back
- Waist strap
- Multiple compartments

Reflective strips on the bag are recommended. They make the child easier to see before sunrise and at night.

How do I pack a backpack?

Always pack the backpack so that most of its weight rests low on your child's back near the waist. Pack the heaviest books closest to the body and distribute other items equally on the right and left sides.

Your child should:

- Bend his knees to pick up a backpack.
- Clean his backpack weekly to take out things he does not need.
- Put things in his locker so his backpack is not heavy.
- Take only what is needed to school.

How much should a backpack weigh?

Backpacks should not weigh more than 10 to 15 percent of your child's body weight. This means a child who weighs 100 pounds should have a backpack that weighs no more than 10 to 15 pounds.

- If your child needs to lean forward to support the weight of his backpack, it is too heavy.
- Use backpacks with wheels and handles if your child needs to carry more than 15 percent of his body weight.

How should my child wear the backpack?

Your child should wear it so that it puts weight on the strongest muscles in the body: back and stomach.

This means:

- Your child should wear both straps over his shoulders.
 - Adjust the shoulder straps so the backpack rests in the middle of his back.
 - The backpack should fit close to his body.
- Secure the waist strap.
 - This helps keep the backpack close to his body.
- Pack items in compartments.
 - This helps distribute heavy loads evenly.
- Make sure the bottom of the backpack rests in the curve of the lower back.
- Check the height of the backpack.
 - It should extend from the waistline to about 2 inches below the shoulders.
- The backpack should never sit more than 4 inches below the waistline.

What else can I do to help my child?

Talk to your child and his teachers to make sure there are no problems. For example, if your child is having back problems and has a heavy book, ask if he can have a second book to keep at home.

Ask your child to tell you if he has any of the following in his back, shoulder or neck:

- Pain
- Numbness (lack of feeling)
- Tingling (itchy or stinging feeling)

This is general information and not specific medical advice. Always check with a doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns about the health of a child.