

Tips to Avoid Backpack Injuries

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“Where did the summer go? It is time to go back to school! Getting ready for school is a challenging task for most parents—purchasing school supplies being one of the biggest. One of the supplies that parents need to pay close attention to is the backpack. It is important to remember to keep the child's safety in mind when doing so.”

When used correctly, a backpack is a very helpful and useful way for a child to carry books and supplies. However, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), if worn incorrectly, backpacks can cause injury to muscles and joints which may lead to severe back, neck, and shoulder pain, as well as posture problems. Injuries can occur when the child attempts to adapt to a heavy load and compensates by using improper postures such as leaning to one side, bending forward, and arching their back. When the backpack is used correctly the back muscles and stomach muscles work together to stabilize the trunk and keep the body in proper alignment.

The following is information from the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) and the AAP on ways to insure proper backpack safety:

1. Choose the right backpack:
 - Wide padded shoulder straps
 - Two shoulder straps (to evenly distribute the weight)
 - Padded back
 - Waist strap (also helps distribute the weight)
 - Multiple compartments
 - Lightweight
 - Rolling Backpacks
2. Prevent injury by:
 - Using BOTH shoulder straps
 - Tighten the straps to fit close to the body – the straps should hold the backpack two inches off the waist
 - Pack light – backpack should never weigh more than 15 percent of the child's total body weight
 - Do not carry unnecessary materials – clean out the backpack daily to lessen the weight
 - Bend using both knees – when bending down, do not bend at the waist when wearing or lifting a heavy backpack.
 - Stand tall when wearing backpack – make sure the child is not leaning forward to compensate for the weight of the backpack.
 - Use the Rolling component of the backpack as often as possible.

Parents can also help by encouraging their child to communicate with them if they have any pain or discomfort when wearing the backpack. Knowledge is the key, teach your child the proper wearing techniques and the risks of improper use of backpacks so they use their backpacks safely through out the day.

For more information about Our Children's House at Baylor, visit www.BaylorHealth.com/OurChildrensHouse.