

“Pack It Light, Wear It Right” Heavy Backpacks Mean Chronic Back Pain

Backpacks are a convenient way to transport a load of books and school supplies between the classroom and home. However, a backpack that is too heavy, or worn improperly, can put children at risk for neck, back and shoulder pain, posture problems, as well as muscle and joint injuries.

"The average student carries a backpack that is too heavy for them, weighing approximately 25 percent of their weight," says Dr. Margaret Harris, extension health specialist with the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture. "A third of students carry backpacks that are more than 33 percent of their weight."

Here are a few guidelines for safe backpack use, suggested by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP):

- Wear both shoulder straps to distribute the weight evenly.
- Pack lightly. The backpack should never weigh more than 10 percent to 15 percent of the student's body weight.
- Organize the backpack so the heaviest items are closest to the back.
- Wear backpacks close to the body, over the strongest back muscles. The straps should be tightened so the backpack rests two inches above the waist.

The AAP also suggests a few criteria when shopping for a new backpack. Look for backpacks that have:

- Wide, padded shoulder straps instead of narrow straps, which can hinder circulation.
- A padded back, to reduce pressure and enhance comfort.
- A waist strap, which can help distribute the weight of the backpack more evenly.

Parents should be aware of how heavy their child's backpack is and whether their child is at risk for injury. If the student experiences pain, tingling or numbness in the arms or changes posture while wearing the backpack, the backpack is too heavy.

For more information on this topic use the link to eXtension at:

http://www.extension.org/pages/Heavy_Backpacks_Mean_Chronic_Back_Pain