

## HEAVY BACKPACKS HURT KIDS

**Question:** School is about to start and I am worried how much our daughter's backpack weighs. She complained of occasional back pain during the school year, but has not during summer. Do you think her back pack could be a problem?

**Answer:** Absolutely! Young children are suffering from back pain much earlier than in previous generations, and the use of overweight backpacks is a contributing factor. In fact, the use of heavy book bags and carriers resulted in more than 6,500 injuries in the year 2000 along, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Since backpacks have emerged as an escalating health and safety issue, the American Chiropractic Association (ACA) and doctors of chiropractic are trying to make parents aware of the dangers of backpacks.

The increase in back pain among youngsters isn't surprising when you consider the disproportionate amounts of weight they carry in their backpacks--often slung over just one shoulder. The average child carries a back pack that would be the equivalent of a 39 pound burden for a 176 pound man or a 29 pound load for a 132 pound woman.

More and more school districts - many of them in urban areas - have removed lockers from the premises, forcing students to carry their books with them all day long. Without a locker, they must bring books to and from school as well.

The problem has become so wide spread, in fact, that the California state assembly passed legislation that would force school districts to develop new ways of reducing the backpack loads. Similar legislation is being considered in New Jersey to limit the backpack weight to no more than 10% of the child's weight.

What can you do? The ACA offers the following tips:

Do not allow the shoulder straps to be too loose. The pack should fit up on the shoulders and at or above the waist.

Make sure your child's backpack weighs no more than 10% of his or her body weight. A heavier backpack will cause your child to bend forward to support the weight on his/her back, rather than correctly on the shoulders.

The backpack should never hang more than 4 inches below the waist line. When it hangs too low, it increases the weight on the shoulders and causes your child again to lean forward.

A backpack with individualized compartments help in positioning the contents most effectively. Make sure that pointy or bulky objects are packed away from your child's back.

Bigger is not better. When there is more room, there is typically more stuff and the backpack becomes heavier.

Urge your child to wear both straps --wide, padded straps are best. Lugging the backpack around by one strap causes an uneven load to back and shoulders, as well as neck.

If your child is experiencing back pain, your school may provide two sets of books. In that way, one book may be left in the class room and not have to be carried around, as well as brought home. The other set of books can remain at home for homework.

If possible, get books on CD-ROM that can be down loaded onto the home computer. This will greatly reduce the weight carried home.

If your child continues to have back pain, consult your chiropractor. Doctors of chiropractic are licensed and trained to treat patients of all ages and will use a gentle type of treatment for children.

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