

The Wellness Family

Dr. Leahy Keeps You Informed

The Backpack Dilemma Function VS Fashion

Chiropractors, pediatricians and orthopedic surgeons alike agree that backpacks are a problem for your child's spine. While alone they may not cause major problems, overloading and improper carrying of a backpack can lead to headaches, neck, shoulder, and lower back pain.

An article published in *Spine* journal stated, "Of the 1,122 backpack users, 74% were classified as having back pain, validated by significantly poorer general health, more limited physical function, and more bodily pain".

How heavy is too heavy?

While healthcare professionals do not agree on the exact weight, the consensus is that more than 10% of your child's body weight can lead to back and neck pain; and the majority of healthcare professionals agree that 15% or more of their body weight can lead to severe back, neck and shoulder pain as well as headaches and other spinal discomfort; not to mention aggravating pre-existing spinal conditions such as scoliosis.

How heavy is too heavy? Did you know that a 60-pound child should be limited to carrying no more than 9 pounds; an 80-pound child, 12 pounds; and a 100-pound pre-adolescent should carry no more than 15 pounds?

So, how do we lighten the load?

It's important to weigh your child's backpack at least once a week. If it exceeds "15 percent" of your child's weight, then work with your child to evaluate their backpack and "lighten the load". The "extra" book, binder, electronic device or water bottle can easily add a hefty and unnecessary extra 10 pounds.

Proper Loading and Carrying

Take a moment to show your child or teen the importance of loading and carrying their backpack. The heaviest items should rest against the back, which

means loading them first and attempting to distribute the weight evenly.

While your child or teen may think nothing of carrying their backpack slung over one shoulder, the truth is that this fashion statement is damaging to their developing spine; one shoulder is being required to carry a burden that both shoulders and the back should be sharing. The only proper way to carry a backpack is with both straps over the shoulders and the backpack resting against the lower back.



"The only proper way to carry a backpack is with both straps over the shoulders."

Function vs. Fashion

Your first priority when purchasing a backpack is to select function over fashion. This request may be easier said than done but years of using a fashion backpack can only lead to improper spinal alignment, poor posture and eventually pain for your child or teen.

Secondly, when looking for a better functional backpack, look for one that meets a few criteria; first, that the backpack fits properly (not too long or too short); and secondly, that it has wide, padded, adjustable straps (for proper positioning on the back)

A third option is to look for a backpack with a hip strap or lumbar pillow. The hip strap, when used, can distribute a portion of the weight to the hips, easing the load on the spine and shoulders. The use of a lumbar pillow will provide the necessary back support to the lumbar region where the greatest portion of weight is being carried. When shopping you need to know

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that the more support you buy, the less spinal stress your child or teen will carry.

Are roller bags the answer? Although one might think that they would be by taking weight off your child's spine and shoulders, it should be noted that an empty roller bag may weigh up to 80% more than an empty backpack. And further, these bags run larger, inviting the owner to overload their extra space as much as 50 pounds. Although these bags will be rolled, don't forget that your child or teen (and their developing spine) are still at risk when they haul their bag up or down stairs or retrieve it from the back seat of the car.

So as you are preparing your child or teen to return to school, take a brief moment to educate them about "function" first.

Child's Weight	Backpack Weight
60 pounds	9 pounds
70 pounds	10.5 pounds
80 pounds	12 pounds
90 pounds	13.5 pounds
100 pounds	15 pounds
110 pounds	16.5 pounds
120 pounds	18 pounds
130 pounds	19.5 pounds
140 pounds	21 pounds
150 pounds	22.5 pounds
160 pounds	24 pounds

Symptoms of Poor Backpack Loading or Carrying

- Aching of the shoulders, neck or back
- Pain, tingling or numbness in the neck, arms or hands
- Weakened muscles
- Headaches
- Hunched posture
- Leaning to one side, backward or forward
- Red marks and creases on the shoulders
- Struggling to put on or take off the backpack

For more information on the proper use of backpacks visit...

www.icpa4kids.org

<http://www.chiro.org/LINKS/backpacks.shtml>

<http://www.amerchiro.org/media/tips/backpacks.shtml>

www.backpacksafe.com

Dear Parent,

Dr. Leahy is dedicated to providing you with the absolute best in family wellness care. Along with that dedication comes an understanding that an informed parent makes wise decisions for their child. So, take a moment today to ask Dr. Leahy about any questions you may have regarding your child or your family's health.

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