

BACKPACKS AND YOUR CHILD

Pediatricians, physical therapists and massage therapists are seeing more young patients complaining of neck and back pain due to an overloaded backpack. The American Academy of Pediatrics says a backpack should never weigh more than 10 to 20 percent of a student's body weight. Even so, your child should have a well-fitting backpack and use it correctly to avoid discomfort and injury. For instance, when bending down, it is important to bend at the knees instead of the waist if you are wearing a backpack.

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILDREN STRATEGIZE

Do your children have a locker where they can store books they're not using? Maybe they can make more frequent locker stops between classes. Talk to their teachers if necessary to explain why they may be late by a minute or two. Must they carry all their books every day? Some schools are providing two sets of textbooks so they can keep one at home and one at school. Ask about this option.

WEIGHT AND PROPER FIT

When your children put on their backpacks, notice if they are leaning forward. If so, it is too heavy. Go through the packs to see what can be left at home or school. Then work with your children in adjusting straps and settling the pack properly on the body. If it still is not working, consider purchasing a better pack.

HOW TO CHOOSE A PACK

Some children like pulling a pack on wheels, which really gets the weight off the back. Another option is an individually fitted internal frame backpack designed to make packing easier on the body. Hip and chest straps like the ones on hiking backpacks can take the weight off the upper back and shoulders. The shoulders and back should be padded for comfort. The shoulder straps should be worn on both sides and tightened, so that the pack is held close to the body.

IF YOUR CHILD IS IN PAIN

If your daughter or son already has problems, see your health practitioner right away. Also, one of the best known benefits of massage is in helping to relieve muscle spasms and improve posture. Massage will have limited effects, however, unless other changes are made.