



“Back” To School with Backpack Safety **By Stacy Fowler, M.S., C.P.T.**

Where backpacks and kids are concerned you’ll want to exercise some caution. Recent studies have shown that heavy or improperly carried backpacks can lead to back pain and poor posture. Some 7,000 backpack injuries are reported every year. As a general rule of thumb, your child’s backpack should weigh no more than 10% of his or her body weight. For example, my daughter Presley weighs 85 pounds – so her backpack should never weigh more than 8 ½ pounds.

Here are some additional points to ponder when purchasing, packing and carrying backpacks:

- Pack heavier items first so that they are closest to the body.
- Kids should pack only what they need and plan to use. They should leave the rest in their desks or lockers.
- The backpack should not hang more than 4 inches below the waistline – you can have your child try the pack on before you buy.
- When lifting the pack, bend at both knees and lift with the legs.
- Look for packs with wide, heavily padded shoulder straps. The straps should hug the center of the back.
- Always wear both straps so that the weight is distributed evenly.
- If heavy loads are routine and it’s feasible, you might try going with a wheeled backpack.
- Look for functional features like pockets and compartments to help spread the weight out.
- Attach a luggage tag to the pack with an adult’s contact information so that if it’s misplaced, it might find its way back to you.

So there you have it. With a little backpack safety, “back” to school will be a lighter load to carry.