

Backpack Safety

BACKPACK WEIGHT AND IMPROPER USE LEAD TO MUSCULOSKELETAL INJURIES.

- Thirty to fifty percent of children ages 15 to 16 suffer from back pain caused by backpacks that are too heavy and worn incorrectly.
- Overloaded backpacks can cause changes in posture, neck, shoulder and back pain and numbness or tingling in arms or legs.
- Improper straps, causing red marks about the shoulder and other contact points can also lead to strain on the back and shoulders.

STEPS CAN BE TAKEN TO PREVENT PAIN AND INJURIES CAUSED BY OVERWEIGHT BACKPACKS.

- Backpacks that are back-friendly, such as those on rollers, lead to fewer injuries.
- Backpacks should weigh no more than 15 percent of an individual's body weight, ideally no more than 10 percent. No one should carry a backpack weighing more than 25 pounds.
- Place heavy items in the backpack first and closest to the body.
- Using both shoulder straps reduces potential pain and injuries.
- Stretching three minutes, twice a day, in the morning and evening, can alleviate back pain.

PARENTS AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS HAVE A ROLE IN GUARDING AGAINST BACKPACK-RELATED PAIN AND INJURIES.

- Parents can lead by example while monitoring what goes into their child's backpack and check its weight when loaded.
- Parents can help a child select a proper backpack with two wide shoulder straps and waist and chest straps and demonstrate how to adjust the straps properly for a comfortable fit.
- Schools that provide textbooks on CD Rom or textbooks to keep in the classroom and at home lighten the weight of the backpack to and from class and home.
- When schools create class schedules that allow frequent visits to lockers to retrieve textbooks, students can carry fewer books in their backpacks.

PHYSICAL THERAPISTS CAN ASSIST PARENTS AND CHILDREN IN MITIGATING BACK, SHOULDER AND NECK PAIN.

- Physical therapists are experts in body movement and performance and can evaluate and assess a child's condition and treatment plan when a child suffers from back pain due to an overweight backpack.
- As highly trained professionals, the physical therapist can help restore function and relieve pain.
- Physical therapists can work with the child and family to determine the best physical activities, exercises and other treatments to increase the child's strength and endurance to get back to school and daily activities free from back, shoulder and/or neck pain.