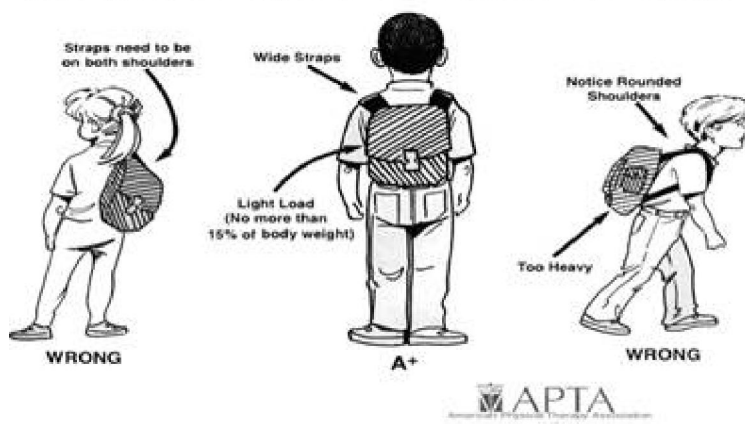


BACKPACK SAFETY AND SELECTION GUIDELINES

Is Your Child's Backpack Making The Grade?



The postures observed in the two “wrong” examples noted above could result in spinal compression and/or improper alignment, which can have a direct effect on the cushioning ability of the discs located between the spinal bones. With the shock absorbing ability of the discs compromised, the individual is at risk for early “wear and tear” arthritis and nerve injury. A child complaining of numbness or tingling may be experiencing excessive pressure on the nerves in his neck and shoulder area. Overloading also causes the muscles of the back to work so hard, that they become strained and fatigued. This makes the back more susceptible to injury and pain.

GUIDELINES FOR PROPER BACKPACK SELECTION AND WEAR

Choosing

- **The size of a backpack** should fit the size of the student. When adjusted properly, the top of the back should be at, but not above, shoulder height, and the bottom should rest just at the curve in the low back area. It should not rest more than 4” below the student’s waistline. The backpack should have *multiple compartments*; not only from front to back, but from top to bottom. This will allow the weight to be distributed more evenly. The width of the backpack should not be wider than the student’s torso. The side of the pack that rests against the student’s back should also be padded. Air cushioning for the lumbar area is available in some models (www.askergoworks.com/cart_ergo_kids.asp)
- **The shoulder straps** should be wide, well *padded* (some models even have air cushions in them) and adjustable.
- **A waist belt** should be on the model you choose, as it helps to distribute the weight more evenly. If your student refuses to wear the belt, then you might want to consider investing in the models that offer a lumbar cushion to help support and buffer the load.
- **Shoulder straps belt** connecting the front of these straps also assures better fit and distribution of weight, as long as it is fastened!
- **Reflective material** on the backpack also provides additional safety during dusk or nighttime use.

While backpacks with wheels offer relief during one level use, they still must be lifted to climb the stairs and are ineffective in snow. In addition, most models weigh significantly more than standard backpacks when empty, due to their added framework. There is also a greater tendency to over pack these types of backpacks. Most models of wheeled backpacks do not fit in lockers at WMS.

Filling

The recommended guidelines for a filled backpack is that it **weigh no more than 15% of a student's body weight**. The safer choice would be that the weight of the backpack, when filled, not exceed 10% of the student's body weight. Therefore, a 100-pound student should not carry a backpack weighing more than 10 to 15 pounds.

The heaviest items should be placed closest to the student's back. If the weight of items is expected to exceed the recommended amount, then the student should hold some texts in their arms, so once again they balance the load.

Use the compression straps on the sides and/or bottom to help consolidate and secure the load, allowing it to stay closer to the body.

Putting The Backpack On

A student should be aware of using proper body mechanics when lifting the backpack and putting it on. They should face the backpack and bend at the knees to grab it, hold it close to them, and then lift it using their legs. One strap should be put on at a time.

Adjusting

Both shoulder straps should always be worn (while some models with the lumbar air cushion state they distribute the weight with even just one strap in use, there is no need to share this information with your student... using two is always a better, safer choice!) and adjusted so the pack fits snugly to their back.

The following Internet resources were used to assist in the preparation of this handout:

http://www.tbihelp.org/school_back_pack_safety_tips.htm

<http://www.med.umich.edu/>

<http://www.aota.org>

<http://www.ccapta.org/BackpackSafety.htm>

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