



ACTIVE
LIVING
physiotherapy

Are your kids ready? Back to School Back Pack Tips



By Sophia Sauter
Registered Physiotherapist
Owner, Active Living Physiotherapy

You've bought the pencils, binders, the latest clothing, and a back pack. The kids are ready. But have you considered how a back pack will fit your child? To avoid neck and back pain, a back pack should be the right size, adjusted and worn properly, and not be overloaded. When body weight distribution is thrown off by carrying a one-shoulder bag for example, the body must compensate. The imbalance can cause a multitude of potential problems from postural misalignment to over-extended or strained muscles and ultimately injury.

Here are a few pointers to avoid injury and pain:

- **Your child's back pack should not weigh more than 15 per cent of his or her body weight.** For example, if the child weighs 80 pounds, he or she shouldn't be carrying more than 12 pounds in his backpack. If the pack forces the carrier to lean forward, it's over-loaded. Try standing on your bathroom scale with and without a fully loaded backpack to find out how much it actually weighs, you will be surprised how quickly it adds up!
- **Make sure the back pack is positioned across the midback with the top of the bag at shoulder height and the bottom resting in the hollow of the back.** Do not allow the pack to hang below the waist. When buying a backpack, the size will depend on your child's torso length, not their overall height.
- **Use both straps over the shoulders.** The pack should have wide, padded shoulder straps to avoid pressure on the nerves around the shoulder and chest area. Avoid using only one shoulder strap. The padded waist strap should be tightened around the child's hip bones, to take the weight off the shoulders. A chest strap will further help unload the shoulders. Some packs come with tension straps which are ideal to pull the load closer to the body.
- **Load the heaviest items closest to the child's back.** This will help take the load off the shoulders and back muscles and keep the load close to the child's center of mass.
- **Consider a backpack with wheels** (similar to roller luggage) if your child is always carrying a heavy load. Make sure the extended handle is the appropriate height to prevent excessive bending and twisting.
- **Listen to your child.** If he or she continues to complain of pain and discomfort, or worse yet, hand and arm numbness, do not shrug it off. Have them evaluated by a physiotherapist or other medical professional.

For more information on back pack fitting, contact the physiotherapists at Active Living Physiotherapy
778.420.0111 www.activelivingphysio.com