



BACK PACKS AND MORE:

Tips for back-to-school

It's (almost) back-to-school time...and with that comes a reminder that heavy back packs and bad posture can hurt your kids and their backs. **Here are some tips that will help keep your children healthy during the coming school year:**

Number 1: Find a good back pack! Using a backpack allows a child to carry a number of schoolbooks and items in a practical way, distributing the heavy load across the strong back and shoulder muscles. The risk, however, is overload, which can strain the back, neck, or shoulders. A heavy weight carried in backpacks can distort the natural curves in the middle and lower backs, causing muscle strain and irritation to the spine joints and the rib cage and also lead to rounding of the shoulders. Here's what you can do:

*Teach your child how to **properly load and wear the backpack** to avoid back pain:*

- Use both shoulder straps and **wear the backpack on the back**, not over one shoulder.
- **Pack heaviest objects first** so they are carried lower and closest to the body
- **Fill compartments** so that the load is evenly distributed throughout the backpack.
- Pack sharp or bulky objects in the backpack so they do not contact the back
- **Adjust the straps to fit the backpack snugly to the child's body**, holding the bottom of the backpack two inches above the waist and keeping the top just below the base of the skull; do not carry the backpack low near the buttocks
- **Lift the backpack by using the leg muscles and keeping it close to the body**, not by bending over with arms extended
- **Do not lean forward when walking**; if this is necessary, there is too much weight in the backpack.
- **If the child complains of discomfort, reduce the weight in the backpack immediately.** Apply a backpack weight limit as a percent of the child's body weight. The American Chiropractic Association advises 5-10%
- Coach your child to **carry only those books needed** in the backpack, leaving unnecessary items at home and making frequent trips to his/her locker during the day
- Train your child to **clean out the backpack at least once a week**

Here's a few additional quick tips for back-to-school:

1. When studying or reading, have your child **use a book stand so that the book is at eye level.** This will reduce the amount of strain on their neck and shoulders from reading a book that lays flat.

2. Is your child returning back to school sports after some time off during the summer? **Remember that their body may not have done that sport in a while and will need extra time to warm up.** Have them warm up for a minimum of 10-15 minutes before playing. The warm up should involve simple movements that simulate their sport and get the heart rate up. Always stretch afterward.
3. **Sitting in class with good posture will reduce the strain on your child's neck, shoulders and low back.** It will also help keep them attentive during class! They should sit with shoulders back, chin tucked in and a gentle "C curve" in the low back. Don't arch the lower back or slump forward. The ears, shoulders and hips should be in a straight line. They should make use of breaks! Between classes stand up, walk around and stretch.
4. Be well adjusted. The average child spends approximately 6.5 hours watching various media each day. Repetitive or prolonged postures while watching television, playing on the computer or cell phone can certainly impact a developing spine. In addition, by the age of seven, a child will have fallen around 2,500 times, and prior to turning three, they will have had three major falls out of a bed, off a changing table, or down a flight of stairs. **Chiropractors can assess how your child's spine and nervous system is adapting, and with regular adjustments, they can support your child's body in growing optimally.** Chiropractic adjustments remove nerve dysfunction, allowing the body the opportunity to restore balance and re-build immune strength.

(This article is adapted from "5 Easy Tips for Keeping the Entire Family Healthy for Back-to-School, "Tips to Prevent Back Pain from Kids' Backpacks, and "Backpacks and Back Pain in Children" – all found at spine-health.com, and from "Back to School Health Essentials" at truehealthct.com.)

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