

### **Backpack Safety**

Backpacks are a popular and practical way for children and teenagers to carry schoolbooks and supplies. When used correctly, backpacks can be a good way to carry the necessities of the school day. They are designed to distribute the weight of the load among some of the body's strongest muscles of the body.

**Choose the right backpack.** Look for the following:

Wide, padded shoulder straps. Narrow straps can dig into shoulders. This can cause pain and restrict circulation. Backpacks with one shoulder strap that runs across the body cannot distribute weight evenly. Try and have padded straps each at least 2 inches wide

Padded back. A padded back protects against sharp edges on objects inside the pack and increases comfort.

Waist strap. A waist strap can distribute the weight of a heavy load more evenly. This is especially for smaller children

Lightweight backpack. The backpack itself should not add much weight to the load.

Rolling backpack. This type of backpack may be a good choice for students who must tote a heavy load. Remember that rolling backpacks must be carried up stairs.

Always use both shoulder straps. Slinging a backpack over one shoulder can strain muscles.

Tighten the straps so that the pack is close to the body. The straps should hold the pack around two inches above the waist.

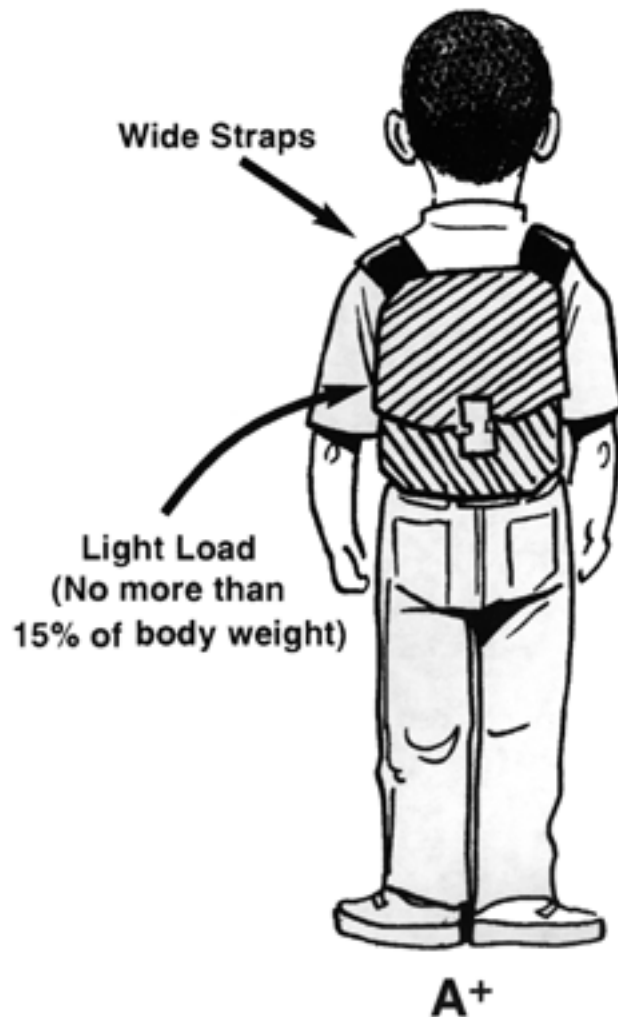
Pack lightly. The backpack should never weigh more than 15 percent of the student's total body weight.

Organize the backpack to use all of its compartments. Pack heavier items closest to the center of the back. There, your larger back and trunk muscles can manage the load easily.

Stop often at school lockers and remove items you don't need, if possible. Do not carry all of the books needed for the day.

Bend using both knees, when you bend down. Do not bend over at the waist when wearing or lifting a heavy backpack.

Learn back-strengthening exercises from your physiotherapist to build up the muscles used to carry a backpack.



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.

### **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.

### **Parents also can help in the following ways**

Encourage your child or teenager to tell you about pain or discomfort that may be caused by a heavy backpack. Pain that is persistent is a warning that something is wrong. Seek assessment and advice from a physiotherapist. It is always easier to correct problems at an early stage than to be treating real injury later on.