

# Your Backpack Guide

## How to Choose a Safe Backpack for School

Backpacks are a necessity for today's students to carry books and school supplies. But some doctors are concerned about possible health issues. When it's time to buy a backpack for your child, you may want to consider these tips:

### Size and Weight:

- Determine how much weight and what size objects your child will carry to school, and buy accordingly. Choose the smallest possible backpack that is just large enough to hold all the essentials: lunch box, books, notebooks, etc. When filled, a backpack should never weigh more than 20% of a child's weight.
- Backpacks which are wider than your child's torso are not recommended; they should rest against the curve of your child's back but not more than 4 inches above their waist.
- Lightweight nylon or canvas might be the best choice for material. Leather backpacks may be durable but are heavier and may retain water if wet.
- Backpacks with a sturdy, internal frame will provide stability, support, and comfort, and will help distribute weight more evenly. Thumb loops, a waist belt and a sternum strap will also help prevent excessive shoulder pain.

### **Teach your child to use both straps.**

*Wearing a backpack on only one shoulder can lead to curvature of the spine, shoulder pain, and cause a child to lean to one side. Wearing a backpack improperly can also cause tingling in the neck, arm, and hands.*

### Straps, Zippers, Pockets and Wheels:

- Wide, padded adjustable straps and a padded back are the best choice and will help distribute weight more effectively.
- Choose backpacks with double-headed zippers. Zippers which can be locked will help protect your child's belongings as well as keep items in the backpack.
- Choose backpacks with large exterior pockets for easy access. Multiple compartments also help distribute weight more evenly.
- Backpacks with wheels are recommended; however, your child's school may not allow this type of backpack. Check with your child's school before purchasing this type.



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continued

## How to Safely Use a Backpack:

- Pack lightly and organize the backpack to use all of its compartments.
- Pack heavier items closest to the center of the back.
- Ensure that a backpack, when filled, never weighs more than 10-20 percent of your child's body weight (measure if you have to).
- Use both shoulder straps (slinging over one shoulder can strain muscles).
- Tighten the shoulder straps to fit closely to the body and just above the waist.
- Suggest that unnecessary items (e.g., diaries, ipods, personal books, etc.) be left at home.

- Reinforce proper lifting technique to avoid back injuries (i.e., bend at the knees and grab the pack with both hands when lifting a backpack to their shoulders).

**Teach your child** to carry only necessary items in the backpack to reduce the weight.

The information contained in this Back-to-school Backpack Guide has been compiled from the following online sources: [www.ehow.com](http://www.ehow.com) and [www.tweenparent.com](http://www.tweenparent.com). © 2011

