

## Backpack Safety

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Almost every kid will have a backpack when they head back to school. The question often becomes how to pick the right one? Often parents just pick whichever one the child or teen really likes but there are some key things to look for when choosing a backpack. Besides choosing the right pack there are also important things to look for when packing it. Backpacks that are too heavy and ill-fitting can lead to shoulder pain, neck pain and headaches. This, in combination with students constantly sitting at desks and looking down, as well as kids looking down at their phones and tablets for hours a day, can lead to a very challenging problem to fix. Here are some guidelines to help all parents when it comes to picking and packing a backpack.

- 1) Size: The width of the pack should be no wider than the child's torso. Lengthwise the pack should start at the top of the shoulder and end at the waist (no packs hanging down over the kids' bottom).



- 2) Features: Look for a bag that has multiple pockets and wide, padded straps (with both straps worn). A chest and waist strap are very helpful, especially in teens' packs, to off load some of the weight.



- 3) **Weight:** The general recommendation is that the fully loaded pack should weigh no more than about 10-15% of the child's body weight. For a 100 pound kid that is only 10-15 pounds! Try leaving unnecessary text books at home, emptying water bottles before walking home, and bringing smaller notebooks rather than big binders.
- 4) **Packing:** Pack heavier items closer to the child's back in the inner pockets and lighter items in the smaller, outer pockets. This allows the core muscles to stabilize better with the load close to the body.
- 5) **Screen time:** This is not directly related to backpack use but a friendly reminder that the recommended amount of daily recreational screen time is a **MAXIMUM** of two hours per day. As mentioned above too much screen time greatly contributes to problems in the shoulders, neck and headaches.

Hopefully these tips will be helpful in preventing your child or teen from developing pain related to their backpacks! If you have any questions talk to your physiotherapist or occupational therapist.