

1. Backpack Safety to Prevent Back Pain

More and more children are complaining of back pain and a major cause of this is due to carrying backpacks that are too heavy, too large, or not used properly. We'd like to spare you the guesswork on what to look for in a backpack, how to use it properly, and how much is too much.

Buying a backpack

The most important factor of the backpack is the size. When backpacks are oversized for the child, it's too easy to fill them with more than your child is capable of carrying safely. Holding up the top of the backpack to your child's back, the bottom should not extend below the top of the hips. The straps should be wide and padded, and included should be straps that wrap around the waist and/or chest for extra help when the load is heavy. An added bonus is if there is some padding on the back of the backpack, where it rests against the child's back.



Wearing a backpack properly



The backpack design is in fact good for the body... even better than messenger bags, one-shoulder bags, and the wheeled suitcase-style bags* now on the market. The backpack's benefits are maximized by using both straps, and tightening the straps so the backpack feels snug and the top is at the level of the shoulders. When the load is extra heavy, using the waist (and sometimes even a chest) strap helps distribute the weight more evenly. These simple steps will make even a heavy backpack feel lighter on the body. When not worn properly, the weight of the backpack pulls on the shoulders and rests on the pelvis, increasing the likelihood of shoulder and low back pain.

(* wheeled backpacks are not recommended as they are heavier than regular backpacks, are tripping hazards, encourage overloading, make it difficult to up or down stairs, or in and out of vehicles.)

Recommended weight limits for backpacks

According to the BC Chiropractic Association, the recommended maximum weight a school-aged child should carry is 10% of their body weight. On a regular basis, however, we recommend that an elementary school child carries less than 10% of his or her body weight in a backpack to prevent back and shoulder strain. The following recommendations are averages; stronger and fitter children are less at risk for harm at the limits than weaker and more sedentary children.

Child's weight	Maximum weight of backpack (filled)
20 kg	2 kg
40 kg	4 kg
60 kg	6 kg

Recommendations for back pain in children

Back pain in children can result from many activities, ranging from heavy backpacks to poor posture, sporting injuries, horseplay, illness, and even prolonged inactivity. Pain is often underreported by children and spinal problems can appear as fussiness, restlessness, sluggishness, awkward posture and unwillingness to participate in physical activities. Chiropractors are specially trained to identify spinal misalignments and correct them using gentle, non-invasive techniques, even before these problems become serious enough to warrant medical interventions (namely medication or surgery). Upon a thorough examination, chiropractors would be able to identify possible causes of the pain and make appropriate suggestions for healing and injury prevention. Backpack-induced back pain is preventable and optimal health for your child is possible. Choose well.