

## Backpack Strategies for Parents and Students

# Pack It Light, Wear It Right

**A**ching back and shoulders...weakened muscles...tingling arms...stooped posture.

Does your child have these symptoms after wearing a heavy school backpack? Carrying too much weight in a pack or wearing it the wrong way can lead to pain and strain. Parents can take steps to help children load and wear backpacks the right way to avoid health problems.

### Loading a backpack

Never let a child carry more than 15% of his or her body weight. This means a child who weighs 100 pounds shouldn't wear a loaded school backpack heavier than 15 pounds.

Load heaviest items closest to the child's back (the back of the pack). ▶

Arrange books and materials so they won't slide around in the backpack.

Check what your child carries to school and brings home. Make sure the items are necessary to the day's activities.

On days the backpack is too loaded, your child can hand carry a book or other item.

If the backpack is too heavy, consider using a book bag on wheels if your child's school allows it.

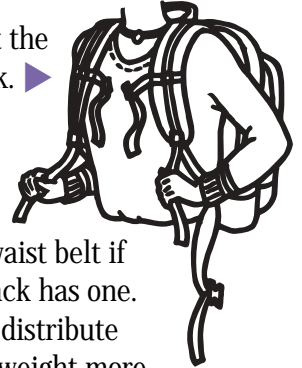


### Wearing a backpack

Both shoulder straps should always be worn. Wearing a pack slung over one shoulder can cause a child to lean to one side, curving the spine and causing pain or discomfort.

Select a pack with well-padded shoulder straps. Shoulders and necks have many blood vessels and nerves that can cause pain and tingling in the neck, arms, and hands when too much pressure is applied.

Adjust the shoulder straps so that the pack fits snugly to the child's back. ▶  
A pack that hangs loosely from the back can pull the child backwards and strain muscles.



◀ Wear the waist belt if the backpack has one. This helps distribute the pack's weight more evenly.

The bottom of the pack should rest in the curve of the lower back. It should never rest more than four inches below the child's waistline.

School backpacks come in different sizes for different ages. Choose the right size pack for your child's back as well as one with enough room for necessary school items.

### Need more information?

If you would like to consult an occupational therapist about an ergonomic evaluation, talk to your child's teacher about whether a referral to occupational therapy is appropriate. Your physician, other health professionals, and your school district's director of special education may also be able to help.

Occupational therapy practitioners are trained in helping children with a broad range of issues in addition to ergonomics, such as good handwriting skills and developmental and behavioral problems, to help them participate more fully in the "occupation" of living. Practitioners work with children in every school district in the nation to improve skills that will help them perform daily tasks at home, at school, and at play.

**For more information on occupational therapy, visit [www.aota.org](http://www.aota.org).**

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**Lighten Up!**  
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