

“Back To School = Backpack Safety”

By: Dr. Brandon Crouch

August is here and that means it is time to get ready for school. Although many kids may not get excited about going back to school, most do get excited about going back to school shopping! One of the most important purchases a parent can make is the right backpack.

The US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) stated that in the year 2002, more than 7,000 emergency room visits were reported resulting from injuries related to book bags. You can be sure that there are many more injuries that never go reported. The CPSC also cites the statistic that backpack-related injuries are up 360 percent since 1996.

Here are some keys to keeping your child safe from backpack injuries: (source: Backpack Safety America)

Step 1: Choose Right.

Choosing the right size backpack is the most important step to safe backpack use. The backpack should never hang lower than 4 inches below your child’s waistline. Make sure it has wide, cushioned, and adjustable shoulder straps to evenly distribute the contents’ weight to reduce pressure on the shoulders and neck. A lumbar waist belt on the backpack will help to keep it from swaying back and forth as they walk.

Tip: Be involved and help your child pick out the correct size backpack.

Step 2: Pack Right.

The maximum weight of the loaded backpack should not exceed 15 % of your child’s body weight, so pack only what is needed. That means if their body weight is 80 pounds, they should carry 12 pounds or less in their backpack.

Tip: If the backpack forces the wearer to hold their head forward to carry, it's overloaded.

** To see how hard it is on your child’s back and spine, try loading the backpack to 15% your body weight and see for yourself how hard it is to carry!

Step 3: Lift Right.

Have your child face the backpack and bend at the knees. While using both hands they should lift with the legs and apply one shoulder strap and then the other.

Tip: Don't sling the backpack onto one shoulder.

Step 4: Wear Right.

Your child should ALWAYS use both shoulder straps – keep them snug, but not too tight. Teach your child that when they load the backpack to be sure to pack the heavier books/items towards the back so that they will lay closest to the child’s back. The lighter items should be the farthest from your child’s back.

Tip: When the backpack has a waist strap – have them use it.

Wearing the correct size backpack and wearing it properly should be a serious concern for parents. Most problems adults have with their back, neck, and spines originate from childhood injuries that are left uncorrected. If your child uses a rolling book bag the same principles still apply. Too much weight, incorrect size, or improper loading can still cause injuries to the neck, shoulders, and back as they pull the bag behind them. When in doubt, consult with your health professional so they can help you. Make sure to watch out for the signs of a problem by looking for -- pain, red marks from straps, poor posture (head held forward) -- indicating a backpack that fits poorly or is overloaded. Picking out the proper backpack and making sure your child knows how to load and wear it will send them off to school the healthy way!

About the Author:

Brandon Crouch, D.C.

Dr. Brandon Crouch is a Chiropractor with Crouch Family Chiropractic. He can be reached for questions at 270-842-1955 or via email: crouchfamilychiro@hotmail.com. You can also find out more about health related issues at www.crouchfamilychiro.com and www.GetWell-Naturally.com.

Sources:

1. US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC); www.cpsc.gov
2. Backpack Safety America; www.backpacksafe.com
3. Richard Paul Duck Sense Programs; www.richardpaul.com; Backpack Safety - Articles
4. Chiropractic Research; Backpack Safety is Back-to-School Issue; www.chiropracticresearch.org