

TIPS AND INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOLBAG

About

The weight of school bags is now on the rise with kids carrying heavy bags with books, sports equipment, shoes, musical instruments and much more. Back pain in children must not be ignored if it is related to heavy school bags as the weight of the bag can cause permanent deformity of spine.

A combination of approaches, ideas and suggestions, along with cooperation between parents and school can go a long way in reducing the burden of one of the most serious health hazards of recent times.

So what can you do about it?

To some degree it's about helping your child get organised. What you want to do is lower that backpack weight to body weight index. This means making sure they are only taking the books they need to school and only carting the ones home they need for homework. Sure it's easy just to jam all the books in at once, but with some careful planning you can start to chip away at some of the excess weight. How you carry your backpack and the type of backpack you use are all important too. Here's a basic list of how to.

Choosing the right bag

- Backpacks should be ideally no heavier than 10% of a student's weight when packed.
- Make sure the backpack is sturdy and appropriately sized – no wider than the student's chest - and made of light-weight material so that it does not contribute to the total weight of the bag.
- Choose a backpack with broad, padded shoulder straps (narrow straps tend to dig in causing pain). They have to be adjusted in such a way that the thick part coincides with the shoulder. This gives a cushioning effect on the shoulder for the weight it bears distributing the weight of the bag evenly to both shoulders.
- Use both shoulder straps – never sling the pack over one shoulder.
- The straps should be shortened until the bottom of the backpack is just above the child's waist, and not sitting on their buttocks.
- When the straps are shortened to this level, the backpack should lie flat on the child's back.
- Use waist clips to help position the bag close to the child's back.

TIPS FOR PACKING A LIGHTER SCHOOL BAG

1. **Students Plan their day the night before.** Don't overload the backpack. Take only the subject notebooks/folders that are required for the day. This will ensure they are not carrying unnecessary books and supplies.
2. **Cut down on stationery and supplies.** Rather than carry a diary, consider an electronic option from your child's device. They can use the diary, reminders or even sticky notes on their Surface Pro. Take only one or two pencils, highlighters, whiteboard markers, textas and coloured pencils in their pencil case. Have a separate document wallet for each class, or a small binder with dividers for each class, or even a small concertina folder with inserts for each class, which can hold students' whiteboard and device. There are plenty of innovative products on the market to suit individual needs. Students don't need a whole ream of paper for writing and can just carry a few sheets of paper for each class.
3. **Place all heavy items close to the spine,** for a better distribution of the weight. The further away students pack items the more likely they'll pull the spine in that direction causing bad posture or injury.
4. **Make use of the various compartments** to put in devices, books, notebooks, stationery and lunch boxes. This will not only help students find things easily, but will also distribute the weight more evenly.
5. Rather than bring a full water bottle to school **bring a half or empty water bottle to fill up at school.**
6. **Clean out the backpack often.** If your child is on the messy side unnecessary papers and other odds and ends can add considerable weight.
7. If your child walks to school, **consider a trolley bag or rolling backpack.** If they ride a bike, **consider a basket at the front** to place the backpack in. *Although these might not be considered "cool" options the bright side is they are less likely to encounter problems with theft.*
8. **Purchase a pair of black joggers to wear on sports days** to prevent your child having to carry an extra pair of shoes to school.
9. **Remember,** buying the largest backpack available may not be the answer as this may encourage your child to pack items that are not required adding to the weight.

POSTURE FOR CARRYING SCHOOL BAGS

1. The position of the backpack must be high over the strong mid-back muscles, not exceeding more than 4 inches below waistline.
2. The weight of the backpack must be close to the child's centre-of-mass, that is, as close to the back as possible.
3. Do not lean forward or backwards when carrying the bag. Maintain a straight back, with the bag just close to your back.
4. Do not carry the bag on one side, hoping to shift to another when tired. This kind of habit can bend the backbone sideward because of asymmetric weight distribution.