

Protect young backs

Help prevent back pain and postural issues as they grow



Back pain is usually a condition we associate with growing older, however more and more children and youth are reporting discomfort and poor posture. In many cases the cause of back pain is the result of carrying excessive loads to and from school in an ill-fitting back pack.

An Australian study found that heavily loaded backpacks (loaded with more than five kilograms) were responsible for posture problems that may cause neck and back pain and could lead to permanent spinal damage.

Here is a brief guide on how to choose the right back pack, fit it correctly and ensure the load your children are carrying is kept at a comfortable level.

Choosing the right back pack

If you're looking for a back pack for your child here are some key features to look out for:

- a lightweight pack that doesn't add a lot of weight to your child's load
- two wide, adjustable, padded shoulder straps; straps that are too narrow can dig into shoulders
- a padded back, which not only provides increased comfort, but also protects kids from being poked by sharp edges on objects (pencils, rulers, notebooks, etc.) inside the pack
- a waist belt, which helps to distribute the weight more evenly across the body
- multiple compartments, which can help distribute the weight more evenly

Choosing the correct size

The top of the back pack should be no more than 3cm (1inch) higher than the shoulders so that your child can look up at the ceiling without hitting it. The bottom of the bag should sit slightly lower than the iliac crest (that bony part of your waist you can put your hands on top of). If your child's bag has a waist strap, it should wrap around the body just below this crest. It allows some of the bags weight to be taken by the hips, lightening the load on the back and shoulders.

Some bags may also feature the sternal strap which joins the two shoulder straps. To help take strain off the shoulders it should be positioned 6cm below the collar bone.

How to fit your child's school bag

Ideally, the centre mass of a pack should be at waist height. It should fit the body comfortably and have adjustable buckles to lower or lift the pack into position once on the wearer's back. There should be a waist belt to keep the load in place when on the move, and separate compartments to allow heavy items to be packed close to the body. The pack should be padded where it touches the back, and should be made of firm material to prevent sagging.



Adjusting the straps

The straps should be tight enough so that the bag is held against the torso. It shouldn't be leaning away, leaving a gap between the back of the shoulders and the bag, and shouldn't have room to swing around.

It mustn't be so tight that it's uncomfortable or digs in to the underarms.

Quick Tips

Limit the child's load; plan ahead so they don't carry too much.

They should never carry more than 10% of their body weight.

Pack heavy items closest to the spine.

They should take regular short rests when carrying a heavy pack.

They should always wear their backpack over both shoulders.

If you would like a physiotherapist to help you with a FREE fitting of your child's back pack contact our practice to make a booking.



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