BACKPACK SAFETY

DOES YOUR CHILD’S BACKPACK MAKE THE GRADE?

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BACKPACKS ARE A POPULAR WAY FOR SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN TO CARRY AROUND BOOKS AND SCHOOL SUPPLIES. MORE THAN 40 MILLION STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES CARRY SCHOOL BACKPACKS. When worn properly, backpacks are designed to distribute the weight of the load to some of the body’s strongest muscles. However, if backpacks are too heavy or worn incorrectly, injuries may occur. Common injuries include back pain, shoulder strain, and wrist and ankle injuries from falls.

A GOOD REMINDER National attention has been gained in the appropriate use of backpacks with school-age children. The American Academy of Pediatrics, American Physical Therapy Association, and American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) have all published recommendations and guidelines to best educate parents, physicians, and schools on proper use and appropriate weight loads for children using backpacks.

The AOTA has a national Backpack Awareness Day every year to remind children and adults to “Pack it Light, Wear it Right!”

THE RIGHT KIND Make sure your child’s backpack is making the grade by choosing a backpack that:
• Has wide, padded shoulder straps.
• Has a padded back.
• Includes a waist strap.
• Is lightweight.
• Contains reflective materials.

Specialty packs may include rolling backpacks, but they still need to be carried up stairs occasionally.

HOW TO WEAR IT Once you have the right backpack, it’s important to pack and wear it correctly:
• Pack a light load (no more than 15 percent of a child’s body weight).
• Always use both shoulder straps, and waist straps if available.
• Tighten the straps so that the pack is close to the body.
• Make frequent stops at the locker during the school day to lighten the load.

Parents: DON’T LET BACKPACKS BE A HAZARD! A backpack may be too heavy if your child has back or shoulder pain, tingling in the arms, or red marks on the shoulders. Speak with your child’s pediatrician if these complaints arise.

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Sources: American Academy of Pediatrics (www.AAP.org), American Physical Therapy Association (www.APTA.org)