

# Backpack Safety for Children

## Wearing Backpacks

Backpacks are a good way for children to carry books, homework and other belongings from place to place. To help prevent injury, it is important for your child to wear a backpack the right way.

Most injuries are caused by a backpack that is too heavy. To cope, children will often arch their back, lean forward or lean to one side.

This can cause back pain, neck and shoulder strain, and poor posture. Your child could also fall, trip over the backpack or bump into others.

To help prevent injury, your child's backpack should not weigh more than 10 to 15 percent of their weight.

For example, if your child weighs 50 pounds, their backpack should not weigh more than 5 to 7 ½ pounds.

## Dos and Don'ts When Wearing a Backpack

### Do

- Wear both straps. Use the waist belt if available.
- The straps should fit comfortably on the shoulders and under the arms. Your child's arms should move freely.
- The bottom of the backpack should rest in the contour of the lower back.
- The backpack should sit evenly in the middle of the back.



Photo © Allina Health System

**Make sure your child wears both straps and the bottom of the backpack is resting in the contour of their lower back.**

### Don't

- Don't use only one strap. This will affect your child's posture.
- Don't let the backpack sag down toward the buttocks.
- Don't fill the backpack too full.

**(over)**

## How to Choose a Backpack

When choosing a backpack for your child, choose one that has:

- **a padded back.**  
This will reduce the pressure on your child's back. It will also keep the items in the backpack from digging into their back.
- **padded, contoured shoulder straps.**  
These will reduce pressure on your child's chest and shoulders.
- **a waist belt.**  
This will help distribute some of the weight to your child's pelvis.
- **compression straps.**  
When compression straps on the sides or bottom of the backpack are tightened, the items in the backpack will be more stable.
- **reflective material.**  
This will help your child be more visible to drivers in the early morning and evening hours.



Photo © Allina Health System

**Don't use only one strap. This will affect your child's posture.**

## What to Do if Your Child's Backpack is Too Heavy

If your child's backpack is too heavy, have your child:

- clean it out each week
- take something out and carry it in their arms
- carry their lunch bag separately
- leave an extra pair of shoes and a sweatshirt at school during the winter months.

You can also ask your child's teachers if there are things they can leave at school.