

Is Your Child's Backpack Making the Grade? **By Jill Timm, MSPT, LAT, CMTPT**

There are clear guidelines to remember when looking at your child's backpack. First, look for two wide and padded shoulder straps and make sure that your student understands that straps should be on both shoulders. Narrow straps can hinder circulations and compress nerves that travel from the neck to the arms causing numbness and/or tingling in the arms and hands. Hanging the straps on only one shoulder leads to uneven weight distribution. An additional waist strap may help distribute the weight of heavy loads more evenly. Secondly, check to see if the backpack has a padded back. This can protect against sharp edges of books and other contents. Weight of the pack itself is also important. Canvas packs are lighter than leather. Next, multiple compartments tend to help better distribute the weight and keep items secure and easy to access. Finally, for the sake of safety, a backpack that has reflective material will enhance visibility of the child to the drivers.

The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) also has recommended maximum backpack weights based on the student's weight. A backpack should be no more than 15% of body weight. Therefore, a student weighing under 60 pounds should not carry more than 5 pounds. A 150 pound student should not have more than a 20 pound backpack. However, observation is the best test. If your child's posture appears to be suffering due to an overloaded backpack, it's time to make a change.

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