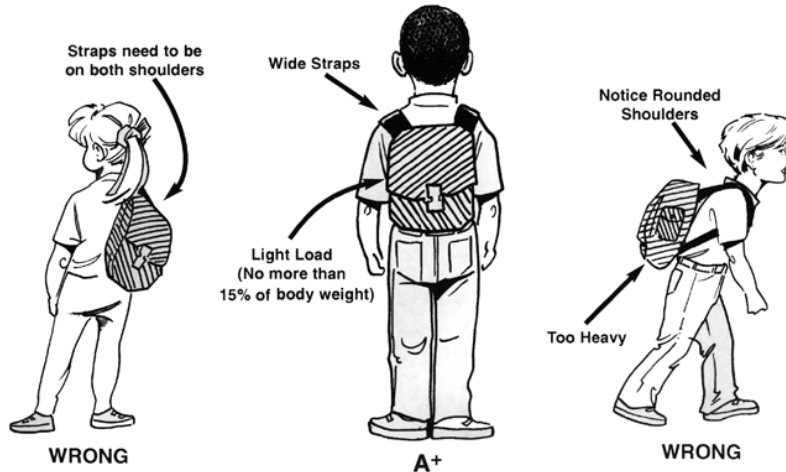


Backpack Safety Tips

Too often, school bags and backpacks are purchased because of the designer and style. Rarely, are backpacks purchased with the safety of the child as a priority. Backpacks have the potential of creating abnormal stresses on the body and potentially causing injury.



When purchasing a backpack:

- 1) Check the size: the backpack should sit on your child's torso 1-2 inches below the shoulders and down to the small of the back. It should never "sag" towards the buttocks.
- 2) Check the fit: when wearing the backpack (equipped with books, etc) your child should be able to stand upright without a change in their normal posture. The child should not have to lean forward and round their shoulders nor should they arch their back to carry the load.
- 3) Check the straps: the shoulder straps should be wide and padded to reduce the compression on the vulnerable nerves and arteries. They should be adjusted to allow free movement of the arms and the ease of removing and putting on of the backpack. Also, look for hip and chest belts. These are important when carrying heavier loads to reduce the pressure on the back and shoulders and important for the older children/adolescents.
- 4) Check the material: Padding on the back reduces pressure and enhances comfort. Padding can also reduce unwarranted sharp or pointed objects from "jabbing" your child in the back. Look for materials (zippers, clasps, canvas, etc) that will endure the rugged use a child puts them through.
- 5) Check the color/design: While color in itself is not a safety issue, reflective material does enhance the visibility of your child in the mornings. Also note any distinguishing marks or designs on the backpack in case it is lost or stolen.

When wearing a backpack:

- 1) Always use both straps: This distributes the load more symmetrically over your child's back and enhances posture.
- 2) Keep the load to less than 15% of their total body weight. Excessive weight creates abnormal postures, fatigues the muscles, and can compress the nerves.
- 3) Observe for signs of pain, change in postures, complaints of tingling or numbness in the arms, or redness on the shoulders and back.