

Overloaded backpacks can injure kids: experts

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Some tips to lighten the load as the school year approaches.

(HealthDay)—As the school season starts, experts warn that overloaded backpacks often result in back injuries among children.

More than 13,700 kids aged 5 to 18 were treated in hospitals and doctors' offices for backpack-related injuries in a single year, according to the U.S. [Consumer Product Safety Commission](#).

The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons (AAOS) advises parents and caregivers to pay close attention to children's posture and not wait for them to complain about back pain before lightening their load.

"When used correctly, backpacks can be a good way to carry the necessities of the school day," Dr. Melanie Kinchen, an [orthopedic surgeon](#) and AAOS spokeswoman, said in an academy news release. "Backpack injuries are commonly caused by wearing overloaded backpacks, as well as lifting and carrying them incorrectly. [Parents and teachers](#) should guide kids to take [preventative measures](#). Start by choosing a backpack that is appropriately sized for your child or have them use a rolling backpack as an alternative to carrying their heavy load on their shoulders."

The academy suggested several additional ways to help children avoid pain and discomfort from wearing a backpack.

- Use both shoulder straps to evenly distribute the weight of the backpack.
- Tighten the straps and use a waist strap if available.
- Place the biggest items in the backpack closest to the back, but remove anything that is too heavy.
- Bend at the knees and use the legs when picking up a backpack.
- Only carry essential items in the backpack. Leave extra books at home or school whenever possible.
- Do not leave backpacks in aisles or walkways to avoid falls.
- Parents and caregivers should encourage children to speak up about any pain or discomfort they feel while wearing their backpack, particularly [numbness](#) or tingling in the arms or legs.
- Children should only wear backpacks that are appropriate for their size.
- Parents and caregivers should be aware of any posture changes in their child or red marks on their shoulders from wearing their backpack.
- Parents should talk to schools about ways to lighten children's load, such as allowing them to stop at their lockers during the day or taking the weight of students' backpacks into account when preparing lessons.

More information:

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers [back-to-school health tips](#).

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