



*April Band-aide Times*

# Back Pack Safety

Backpacks come in all sizes, colors, fabrics, and shapes and help kids of all ages express their own personal sense of style. In addition, if used properly, they can be a useful tool for kids. Many packs come with multiple compartments that help students stay organized while they tote their books and papers from home to school and back again. As practical as backpacks are, though, they can strain muscles and joints and may cause back pain if they are too heavy or used incorrectly. However, there are steps you can take to help your student avoid back pain and other problems associated with improperly used packs.

Most doctors and physical therapists recommend that kids carry no more than 10% to 15% of their body weight in their packs.

Kids who wear their backpacks over just one shoulder - as many kids do, because they think it looks better - may end up leaning to one side to offset the extra weight. They might develop lower and upper back pain and strain their shoulders and neck. Improper backpack use can also lead to poor posture. Girls and younger children may be especially at risk for backpack-related injuries because they are smaller and may carry loads that are heavier in proportion to their body weight.

## **Using Backpacks Wisely**

Here are some easy steps your student can take to prevent injury when using a backpack:

**Lighten the load.** No matter how well designed the backpack, doctors and physical therapists recommend that children carry packs of no more than 10% to 15% of their body weight - but less is always better. If your student does not know what 10% to 15% of his or her body weight feels like, use the bathroom scale to get an idea.

If a student weighs:

- o 50 lbs. should carry no more than 7.5 lbs.
- o 80 lbs. should carry no more than 12 lbs.
- o 100 lbs. should carry no more than 15 lbs.
- o 130 lbs. should carry no more than 19.5 lbs.
- o 150 lbs. should carry no more than 22.5 lbs.

A lot of the responsibility for packing lightly - and safely - rests with your student:

- Encourage your student to use the locker or desk frequently throughout the day instead of carrying the entire day's worth of books in the backpack.
- Make sure your student is not toting unnecessary items - laptops, CD players, and video games can add extra pounds to your student's pack.
- Encourage your student to bring home only the books that are needed for homework or studying each night.
- Ask about your student's homework planning. If you have noticed that your student seems to have a heavier pack on Fridays, he or she may be procrastinating on homework until the weekend, which may make the backpack much heavier.

Use and pick up the backpack properly. Make sure your student uses both shoulder straps. Bags that are slung over the shoulder or across the chest - or that only have one strap - are not as effective at distributing the weight as bags with two wide shoulder straps, and therefore may strain muscles and increase the curvature of your student's spine. It is also a good idea to tighten the straps enough for the backpack to fit closely to your student's body and sit 2 inches (5 centimeters) above your student's waist.

Picking up the backpack, the right way can also help your student to avoid back injuries. As with any heavy weight, your student should bend at the knees and grab the pack with both hands when lifting a backpack to the shoulders.

Use all of the backpack's compartments, putting heavier items, such as textbooks, closest to the center of the back. (Nemours Foundation, 2006).

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month:

**Each day in the United States, more than four children die because of child abuse in the home.**

In 2003, an estimated 1,500 children died of abuse and neglect—an average of more than 4 children per day. (Victims known to child protective services agencies, which track abuse and neglect in the home.)

**More than three-quarters (78.7 percent) of the children who die are younger than four years of age.**

Of these fatalities, 89 percent were under the age of eight; 43.6 percent of the children were under the age of one.

### **Ten Ways to Help Prevent Child Abuse**

⌘ **Be a nurturing parent.**

*Children need to know that they are special, loved and capable of following their dreams.*

⌘ **Help a friend, neighbor or relative.**

*Being a parent is not easy. Offer a helping hand take care of the children, so the parent(s) can rest or spend time together.*

⌘ **Help yourself.**

*When the big and little problems of your everyday life pile up to the point you feel overwhelmed and out of control – take time out. Do not take it out on your kid.*

⌘ **If your baby cries...**

*It can be frustrating to hear your baby cry. Learn what to do if your baby won't stop crying. Never shake a baby – shaking a child may result in severe injury or death.*

⌘ **Get involved.**

*Ask your community leaders, clergy, library and schools to develop services to meet the needs of healthy children and families.*

⌘ **Help to develop parenting resources at your local library.**

⌘ **Promote programs in school.**

*Teaching children, parents and teachers prevention strategies can help to keep children safe.*

⌘ **Monitor your student's television and video viewing.**

*Watching violent films and TV programs can harm young children.*

⌘ **Volunteer at a local child abuse prevention program.**

*For information about volunteer opportunities, call 1.800.CHILDREN.*

⌘ **Report suspected abuse or neglect.**

*If you have reason to believe a student or child has been or may be harmed, call your local department of children and family services or your local police department. ([www.preventschildabuse.org](http://www.preventschildabuse.org))*

Your Student Health Nurse,

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