

Warning signs that a backpack is too heavy include a change in posture when wearing the pack, struggling when putting on or removing the pack, pain when wearing the pack, tingling or numbness in arms or red marks on the shoulders.

See your doctor if your child complains of back pain.

### Useful websites

[www.backcare.org.uk](http://www.backcare.org.uk)

[www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)



The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy is the professional, educational and trade union body for the UK's 50,000 chartered physiotherapists, physiotherapy students and associates

APCP

<https://apcp.csp.org.uk>

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This leaflet has been produced after an initial review of literature and where there is a lack of evidence, a consensus of expert opinion is agreed, correct at time of publication



Association of Paediatric Chartered  
Physiotherapists

## Choosing the right school bag

Information for parents and carers



### **Why does it matter?**

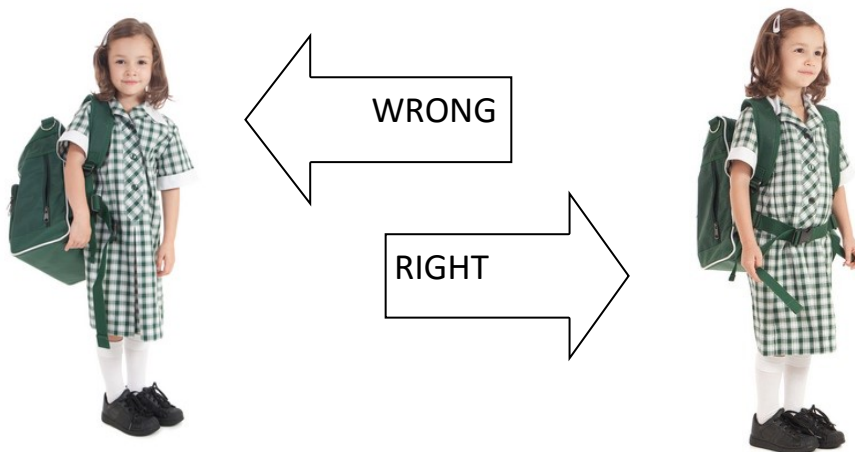
Many studies show that around 30% of school age children have back pain or neck pain. The style of school bag used and some practical tips on reducing stress on the spine may reduce the likelihood of this. Excessive load bearing for long periods on immature spines could put children at increased risk of future back problems in adulthood.

### **How much is too much?**

It is generally accepted that school children should not be carrying more than 10% of their body weight. An average eleven year old may weigh around 75lbs (34kg), 10% is 7.5lbs (3.4kg). This equates to as little as three medium sized books and a lunchbox.

### **Design of school bags**

It is recommended that school bags are one of two types. They can be a 'cross-body' bag (as shown on front) with a wide padded adjustable strap or a rucksack type with two wide padded adjustable straps and ideally a waist belt to take some of the load. In both cases the bag should be worn correctly, not suspended from one shoulder or carried in the hand. The straps should be tight enough to hold the bag close to the body. The school bag should be appropriate to your child's size



### **Tips for school and home**

- Don't keep your bag on your back if you don't need to, if you are standing in the playground take it off and put it on the ground or a bench.
- Don't swing your bag round to put it on, you may hit someone else with it or cause yourself damage to your back or shoulder muscles. Also, when picking up your heavy bag from the floor, bend your knees and squat down, lifting the bag close to your body. This lessens pressure on the spine and reduces the risk of injury.
- Wear your bag correctly, not dangling from one shoulder. Most people will always hang a bag over the same shoulder, causing persistent uneven loading on the spine.
- Use your locker if you have one, try to only carry the books you need for the morning or afternoon sessions. Check your timetable and don't carry all your books, all the time.
- When packing your bag, put heaviest things in first to make you more balanced. Try to get everything you need in one bag rather than carrying several bags.
- If you cycle to school, you shouldn't wear your bag unless it has a waist belt to stop it swinging around, you will need a bag rack or panniers instead.
- Stand up straight when you have your bag on your back, try not to slouch, and stand with your weight evenly on both legs.
- Keep active, it is recommended that children do an hour of physical activity a day, strong muscles will help prevent poor posture and back pain. Being overweight will place extra stress on the spine, hips and knees.