

## Backpacks

Choosing a backpack can be a difficult decision. Comparing is always a smart idea. Backpacks come in an array of sizes, colors, and fabrics. Students of all ages use backpacks everyday. You want to purchase a backpack that fits your body correctly to prevent back problems. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that before you purchase a backpack, look for the following five criteria.



- Choose a **lightweight backpack** that doesn't add a lot of weight to your load. For example, although leather backpacks look cool, they weigh more than traditional canvas backpacks.
- Choose a backpack with **two wide, padded shoulder straps**. Straps that are too narrow can dig into shoulders.
- Choose a backpack that has a **padded back**, which provides increased comfort and protects the wearer from being poked by sharp edges (such as pencils, rulers, notebooks, etc.) inside the backpack.
- Choose a backpack that has a **waist belt**, which helps distribute the weight more evenly across the body.
- Choose a backpack that has **multiple compartments**, which also helps distribute weight more evenly.

Although most backpacks come with two shoulder straps, this doesn't mean that you or

your friends will use both straps! Many kids wear their backpacks over just one shoulder, which is the wrong thing to do. This makes the person lean to one side to offset the extra weight, and they might develop lower and upper back pain and strain their shoulders and neck. Wearing the backpack incorrectly can also lead to poor posture. So, make sure you wear the backpack using **both** straps. It's also a good idea to tighten the straps enough for the backpack to fit close to the body, and it should sit 2 inches above the waist.

Girls and younger children may be especially at risk for backpack-related injuries because they're smaller and may carry loads that are heavier in proportion to their body weight. Doctors recommend that people—especially children—carry backpacks that are no more than 10–15 percent of their body weight. For example, if a child weighs 80 pounds, 15 percent of his or her body weight is 12 pounds. So, for an 80 pound child, the backpack and its contents should not weigh more than 12 pounds—but remember, lighter is always better.

Another option to consider when purchasing backpacks is to look for a backpack on wheels. However, these types of backpacks may be less practical than traditional backpacks because they're difficult to pull upstairs. If you're thinking about purchasing a rolling backpack, contact your school first to be sure that they are allowed. Many schools don't allow rolling backpacks because they pose a tripping hazard in the hallways.

You also need to know how to lift and position your backpack. Improper lifting can cause damage. Use these simple steps to safely lift your backpack:

1. Face the backpack before you lift it.
2. Bend at the knees.
3. Using both hands, check the weight of the backpack.
4. Lift with your legs, not your back.
5. Carefully put one shoulder strap on at a time; never sling the backpack onto one shoulder.

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