



Is your child  
Struggling with a  
Backpack?

## Is Your Child's Backpack Causing Back Pain?

By Karl R.O.S. Johnson, D.C., L.C.P. (hon.)

What's the one irreplaceable item all children need for school in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? The Backpack, of course! Forty million teenagers carry backpacks to school, and now the elementary school children and middle school children are doing it too. More and more doctors are seeing children for back pain and injuries. Thousands of elementary, junior high and senior high school students in our own neighborhoods are heading to their classes with **overstuffed** backpacks slung over their shoulders. While carrying a backpack to school every morning may seem harmless enough, it can cause painful back and neck problems and injuries for students who don't pack or carry their backpacks properly. It can also lead to long-term medical problems.

*USA Today* recently reported on the dangers of children carrying heavy backpacks to school, a growing problem attributed to smaller or no lockers and more homework assignments.

The article suggested that children should carry no more than 10-20% of their body weight in their backpacks. Parents should also make sure their kids carry the backpacks correctly. Ideally, both straps should be used and kept tight to keep the weight evenly distributed across the shoulders.

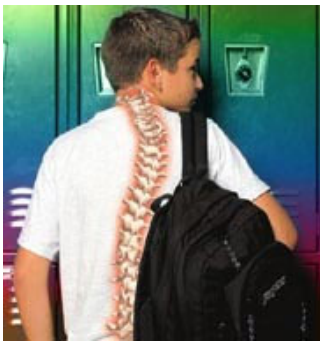
### The Facts:

Medical professionals, however, advise that individuals carry no more than 10-15% of their body weight on their backs. For example, a child weighing...

50 pounds should carry no more than 7.5 pounds;  
80 pounds should carry no more than 12 pounds;  
100 pounds should carry no more than 15 pounds;  
130 pounds should carry no more than 19.5 pounds;  
150 pounds should carry no more than 22.5 pounds.



**Many children are carrying up to 40 pounds and are hurting themselves.**



Today's heavy loads are causing injuries that last a lifetime. If children are feeling headaches, neck aches, bad posture, achy and strained muscles, low back pain, muscle spasms, tingling hands, and increased scoliosis complications, they are carrying too much weight improperly.

Here are some tips from the AirPacks Company for all those who wear backpacks.

- ✓ **Distribute the weight evenly:** Putting the heavier items on the bottom will help to keep the weight off of your shoulders and maintain better posture.
- ✓ **Wear both shoulder straps unless your pack is an AirPacks, which is designed for use on one shoulder.** Lugging a heavy backpack using one strap can shift the weight to one side which can lead to neck and muscles spasms, low back pain, and walking improperly.
- ✓ **Have padded or air-filled straps:** Non-padded will dig into your shoulders and cause pain and injury.
- ✓ **Use a waist belt** unless you are wearing an AirPacks bag.
- ✓ **Lift it right.** Bend your knees when you pick up your heavy backpack.
- ✓ **TAKE ONLY WHAT YOU NEED TO SCHOOL!**

Dr. Karl Johnson, chiropractor and clinical nutritionist, recommends AirPacks because they are an ergonomically designed support system of air-filled cushions in the shoulder straps and the lumbar area, developed with medical professionals, and designed to reduce the stress to the user by 80% and lighten the load by 30%. This, of course, means a more comfortable fit. The weight that usually rests on the shoulders and neck (causing pain and injury) is now resting in the right place, the hips and lumbar area. The wearer can now stand up straighter with shoulders back and experience less strain on shoulders, spine, and lower back.

Your child's health is a top priority. Children are very likely to experience low back pain if the backpacks are carried on one shoulder or if the straps are too loose and the weight is allowed to rest near the small of the back. Help children avoid back and neck problems now. Monitor their backpacks by checking weights and distribution. If possible, get one of the newer backpacks like AirPacks to properly distribute the weight. Help your children be the best they can be.



We would add to the list of recommendations that children who are carrying heavy backpacks throughout the school year should be under regular chiropractic care. Not only will they be better able to deal with the mechanical stress involved but they will also enjoy the health benefits of a properly functioning body. Has Dr. Johnson checked your child for problems associated with back packs? If not, better ask. If you need any further information on backpacks or AirPacks, please call Dr. Johnson's office at (586) 731-8840 or (586) 726-KIDS. He and his staff will be happy to assist you.