

THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR

★ "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" II COR. 3:17 ★ 50 CENTS ★ STATE EDITION



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Too-heavy packs cause problems for young backs

Question: With the start of another school year, children are strapping on their backpacks once more. Tell me about the best and worst packs.

Answer: The worst types of backpacks are the ones that are going to be single strap, so the kid is putting all the weight on one shoulder, and the ones that are not padded.

Even those that you wear across the chest with a single strap, all that weight is going across one side, and you're going to compensate and lean one way to balance when you walk.

The best ones to have are the ones that are going to be double-strap and padded, so the weight can be distributed on shoulders without causing any muscle compression. And if there's an option to have a waist belt connected to the backpack — that would be the ideal backpack.

Q: What sort of problems with packs bring children into your office?

A: It's a pretty wide array. The adolescent to early teen ages are the most problematic because their size hasn't caught up with the size of the book that they're carrying. Students 10 to the early teen years are usually of a smaller stature and they're still carrying around large textbooks that vary from 6 to 8 pounds apiece.

This can cause problems in the shoulders, upper back, lower back. It all stems from how they

compensate, trying to carry this extra weight on their back.

Q: Are there guidelines for safe weight to carry?

A: For kids at the highest risk, particularly adolescent females, the recommended guideline is generally 15 percent of your body weight, plus or minus 5 percent, depending on the fitness level and strength of the child. So a fit 100-pound child could go up to 20 pounds.

Q: What other steps do you recommend children take to reduce the wear on their backs?

A: Find ways to try to limit the weight — stop at their locker more often to change out their books, or do back-strengthening exercises. Even carrying a backpack on wheels. I have seen some kids do that, but it's probably not as convenient if you're going through the snow or have stairs at school.

Also, the heaviest things that you're going to put in the pack should be closest to your back. Don't jam your sports clothes in next to your back.

Ultimately, it's just getting a backpack and minimizing how much weight you carry. Some of those kids are trying to cart around half their weight on their backs, and that's something that's going to cause pain, no matter who you are.

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Ask the doctor



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