

Wellness Articles

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If you would like to be added to the distribution list for these articles, please email: Rebecca.johnson2@albertahealthservices.ca. You will receive a monthly email containing articles for the upcoming four weeks.

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Choose the right backpack

Backpacks are handy for carrying books—and lots of other things. But if they're not used right, they can strain muscles and even cause back pain.

Backpack safety is important for everyone. It's especially important for children, who can be hurt if they regularly carry too much weight or don't wear their backpacks safely.

Look for these features:

- **Lightweight.** Leather backpacks may look nice, but other materials, such as canvas or nylon, weigh less.
- **Wide, padded shoulder straps.** A loaded pack will dig into shoulders if the straps are too skinny.
- **Waist belt.** This is an important feature. It takes some weight off of the back and transfers it to the hips.
- **Handy compartments,** the more the better. They help distribute the weight evenly. They also make packs easier to organize.
- **Padded back.** This keeps sharp edges from digging into the back.
- **Wheels.** These are nice if you or your child needs to carry a lot. But check with your child's school to make sure they're allowed. Remember that these packs will still have to be carried up stairs. And they can get messy when pulled through mud or snow.

Then pack it safely

Experts say a child shouldn't carry more than 15 to 20 per cent of their weight. Don't guess—use your washroom scale to weigh the loaded pack. Pack the heaviest items closest to the back. Packs with compartments make this easier to do.

Lift it safely

- Never bend down from the waist to pick up or set down a heavy pack.
- Always squat down, bending at the knee and keeping your back straight.
- If you need to, you can put one knee on the floor and the other knee in front of you while you lift the pack and swing it around to your back.

Wear it safely

Pack wearers should use both shoulder straps. It may seem easier or more comfortable to sling the pack over just one shoulder, but that's a bad habit that can lead to back or shoulder pain.

- Always use the waist belt and tighten all the straps so the pack fits snugly.
- Make sure your child stands up straight while wearing a backpack. If they must lean forward, the pack is too heavy.
- If your child is having back pain or neck soreness, talk to your doctor. Encourage your children to tell you about any pain or soreness.