

Packing a Backpack: Tips and Tricks

9/1/2021



By: Shelby Hagedorn, COTA/L

Has your child or teen ever said this to you: “My backpack is too heavy” or “My backpack is so uncomfortable”? If they have, your child may need to re-evaluate the type of backpack they are using or how they pack it. Having a proper fitting backpack can prevent physical pain and promote body wellness. Here are some tips and tricks to purchasing and packing a backpack.

Purchasing a Backpack

- **Appropriate Size:** the height of the backpack should be approximately 2” below the shoulder blades to slightly above the waist.
- **Shoulders:** the backpack should have padded shoulder straps that are worn on both shoulders to distribute the weight of the backpack.
- **Hip Belt:** backpacks with hip or chest straps can improve a child’s balance and take strain off their neck and shoulder muscles.
- **Fit:** it is important to try on backpacks just as you would with clothes.

Packing a Backpack

- **Weight:** the backpack should not weigh more than 10% of your child’s weight. For example: if your child weighs 100lbs, their backpack should weigh 10lbs or less.
- **Heaviest Items:** the heaviest items should be packed closest to the back.
- **Lightest Items:** the lightest items should be put in the front pockets.
- **Sharp Items:** the sharp items should be put away from the back.
- **Arrange:** the items in the backpack should be arranged so they won’t slide around.

The American Occupational Therapy Association provides resources for parents and schools about the use of backpacks. For more information and resources, follow this link:

<https://www.aota.org/backpack>

