

## Backpacks

**B** — bring it to school

**A** — assists you

**C** — convenient

**K** — keeps your stuff organized

**P** — plain or fancy

**A** — adjustable

**C** — can hold lots of books

**K** — know how to use one?

What does that spell? **Backpack!**

Backpacks make it easy to carry all of your school essentials. Balancing all those books, papers, notebooks, binders, and school supplies in your arms would be pretty tough without one. And all the little zippered pockets and compartments can help keep you organized.


But backpacks also can be a real pain. Here's why: They can cause injuries if kids trip over them or hit someone with one — accidentally or on purpose. They're heavy so you don't want one to fall on your head or your hand. And heavy backpacks also can strain your neck and back.

Because backpacks are a fact of kid life, let's talk about backpack safety.

### Two Rules to Remember

Here are two big backpacking rules:

1. **Watch that backpack!** Like a disobedient pet, backpacks can get away from you sometimes, so keep an eye on yours. Keep it out of the way where people are walking, such as hallways, the middle aisle on the bus, and the walkway between desks in class. You'll also want to watch out for falling backpacks if you've stored it on the top shelf of your locker.
2. **Check out your blind spot.** Before taking your pack off or putting it on, take a look around you and behind you. This is what your mom and dad do when they back the car out of a parking space. You don't want to back into anyone with your backpack. And, of course, don't **try** to hit someone with your backpack. Loaded down with books, it's like hitting somebody with a bag of bricks.



**You think your backpack is heavy?**

**In 1969, when Neil Armstrong put on his backpack and spacesuit before taking the first steps on the moon, he weighed 360 pounds! Wow - now that's a heavy backpack! But here is the catch: that weight was in Earth pounds. While walking on the moon in full gear, he weighed only a total of 60 moon pounds.**

### Be Kind to Your Back, Neck, and Shoulders

Sometimes, backpacks can give a kid a backache or cause pain in the neck or shoulders. To avoid this, follow these rules:

- Use both shoulder straps so you distribute the weight evenly. Wearing your backpack on only one shoulder may cause you to lean to one side. Adjust the straps, making sure they aren't too loose.
- Stand up straight. If your backpack makes you hunch forward or lean to one side, you might be carrying too much weight or not using both shoulder straps.
- Limit the weight. Carry as few books as possible. If you can leave a few books behind, do so. Doctors recommend carrying no more than 10% to 20% of your body weight. For example, if you weigh 80 pounds, your backpack shouldn't weigh more than 8 to 16 pounds.
- Give your back a break. When you can, leave your backpack in your locker and carry just what you need.

Talk to your mom or dad if you have problems putting your backpack on or taking it off. Also let a parent know if you have any aches, pain, tingling, or numbness (no feeling) in your back or arms.

## **Tips for Buying a New Backpack**

Having the right kind of backpack can prevent problems. So if it's time for you to get a new backpack, consider these tips:

- Choose a lightweight backpack so you don't add to the weight of your books and other supplies.
- Try a backpack with wheels. (Ask if your school allows these first. Because they glide along the floor, they can cause tripping. And they might not fit in your locker.) If you choose a traditional backpack, pick one with a padded back and wide, padded straps that won't dig into your shoulders.
- Look for a pack with multiple compartments inside so the weight can be distributed more evenly.
- Look for a pack that has compression straps on the sides. You can tighten the straps to make your books and supplies snug in the pack. This also can keep them closer to your back.
- Hip and chest straps also can help distribute the weight and ease the pressure on your back.

Now you know how to carry your load of books safely. Happy backpacking!

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