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## Backpack - Breaking Your Back?

### Keep Load Light and Carry It Right

More and more people, in all types of occupations, have opted to utilize backpacks rather than briefcases or other methods of moving items from place to place.

One might think it harmless enough to use a backpack, however, for those who don't pack or carry their backpacks properly it can cause some painful back, neck and shoulder problems as well as a variety of other issues.

First, choose the right backpack. Select a backpack made of light weight material that is proportionate to your body size. The top of the backpack should not stand higher than the top of the shoulders and the bottom should not fall more than 4 inches below the waist line.

- Padded shoulder straps - at least 2 inches wide - Non-padded straps dig deep into muscles causing upper back and shoulder pain.
- Two shoulder straps - having only one strap can cause spine alignment problems.
- Padded back - where backpack touches your back can provide protection from oddly shaped or sharp objects inside.
- Waist strap - effectively helps redistribute as much 50% to 70% of the weight from the upper body on to the pelvis, equalizing the strain of muscles and joints.
- Multiple compartments - will distribute the weight more evenly and assist in preventing contents from shifting.



Next, it is recommended that backpacks should weigh no more than 10-15 percent of your body weight and never more than 25 pounds. Even with the correct weight, you should pack your backpack to reduce the risk of back, neck and shoulder injuries. Pack backpack to create good posture and not require carrier to lean forward and round shoulders, which restricts movement and reduces the ability to maintain balance.



## Backpack - Breaking Your Back? (Continued)

- Weight should be evenly distributed – Put heavier items on the bottom and against the back to keep weight off shoulders and to maintain neutral posture. This also reduces strain as weight is closer to the body's center of gravity.
- Do not overload backpack, carry only items that are needed. The more room there is in a backpack, the more likely overweight become an issue.
- Pack pointy or bulky items in compartments so they do not dig into your back or sides and prevent shifting.

Finally, carry backpack correctly. Backpacks are a popular and practical way to carry books papers, and supplies. They are designed to distribute load weight among some of the body's strongest muscles. Carrying a backpack incorrectly may lead to improper spine alignment causing fatigue and strain and may significantly alter your posture and gait.

- Wear shoulder straps over both shoulders. Placing straps over one shoulder increases strain and can cause you to lean to one side causing muscle spasms and low back pain. By wearing two shoulder straps the weight of the backpack is better distributed and promotes well-aligned posture.
- Adjust the straps to keep the load close, snug against your back.
- Backpack should rest evenly in the middle of your back and hang just below shoulders with the bottom resting in your low back curve. It should never hang more than 4 inches below your waist.
- Belt strap around waist so pack sits comfortably shifting work to your trunk and hips.

Neck and shoulder pain, headaches, low back pain among other issues that come from improperly loading and wearing your backpack can impact quality of life. So, remember to Keep Load Light and Carry It Right to prevent injuries.

