

Healthy Spine WITH Dr. Stein

Do you guys still remember when we (or our parents) went to school? We carried our books strapped together with a belt over our shoulder and when we came home we tossed it in the corner so we could go outside and play. Well, things have changed. I am told kids don't go outside to play anymore; they "meet in chat rooms", text message each other or battle it out in the virtual world of internet gaming. Kids don't use belts anymore either to hold their books together; now they use backpacks.

I can see many youngsters using backpacks that are being carried over one shoulder, they are worn with shoulder straps that are so long that the pack hangs below the buttocks or they are being dragged behind them on little wheels like luggage. Consider these tips:

- The backpack should not weigh more than 15% of the child's bodyweight.
- The child should be able to walk upright while carrying the backpack, having the shoulders back and relaxed and the abs (stomach muscles) slightly tightened.
- Don't carry anything unnecessary to school so check if they could leave certain books at home.
- The backpack shouldn't be bigger (longer or wider) than the child's torso. It ought to be worn over both shoulders with a waist belt because it helps distribute the pack's contents more to the legs and hips. The shoulder straps should be wide and cushiony.
- The heaviest items should be worn closest to the body and somehow secured so they don't shift around and distribute their weight unevenly.
- Backpacks with wheels can help tremendously. Make sure the school allows them and have your child watch their wrists while pulling the pack.
- Use the school lockers if available.
- In order to lift the pack properly, have the child face the pack and lift it close to the body while engaging the legs and not the lower back.
- Consider having your child's spine examined by a qualified healthcare provider. Remember: most spinal problems don't hurt and the majority of spinal problems start in our childhood.

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