

BACKPACK SAFETY

Backpack Safety: How Do You Score?

With back pain being one of the most costly and disabling problems affecting American adults, many health practitioners have begun investigating ways to decrease this problem. Since loss of productivity, health care costs, personal pain and suffering are all associated with back pain, the focus has been aimed toward early prevention as a means to decrease back pain later in life. The following test is a Backpack Safety Questionnaire. Its aim is to help you look at your use of backpacks and alert you to potential back problems. Print it out, check off the choices that apply to you, and then compare your answers to those below the line.

Section A: How heavy is your backpack? (Place a check to signify “YES”)

- Do you struggle to put on or take off you backpack?
- Do you have back, neck or shoulder pain when you are wearing your backpack?
- Do you have tingling or numbness down you arm or hand?
- Do you get red marks on your shoulders from your backpack?
- Do you have to lean forward or to the side to keep your balance when you are wearing your backpack?

Section B: Which backpack features do you have? (Place a check to signify “YES”)

- Two contoured (curved) shoulder straps that allow your arms to move freely and that are wide and padded to distribute the weight of the backpack across your shoulders.
- Padded back for comfort and to reduce pressure on your back.
- Multiple compartments to better distribute weight.
- Hip or chest belt to transfer the weight from your shoulders to your torso/hips.
- Compression straps to secure and stabilize the articles in your backpack.

Section C: How do you wear your backpack? (Place a check to signify “YES”)

- Do you always use both straps of your backpack to promote symmetrical posture?
- Does your backpack rest on your back, between your neck and the curve of your low back?
- Do you use a hip belt?
- Do you use a chest belt?
- Do you organize the articles in the backpack so that the heaviest/biggest articles are closest to your back?
- Do you only carry the articles that you are required to have that day?

Questionnaire Results:

Is My Backpack Too Heavy?

If you answered, “YES” to any of the questions in Section A, then your backpack is probably too heavy. To lighten your backpack, carry only those items that you are required to have that day. Try using lightweight folders instead of binders, and avoid carrying heavy textbooks as much as possible. If you must carry textbooks, carry them in your arms instead of putting them in your backpack. Keep in mind that your backpack should weigh no more than 20% of your body weight. Carrying a backpack that is too heavy can cause poor posture and muscle fatigue, and can increase your risk of injury.

Is My Backpack Well Designed?

If you answered “YES” to all the questions in Section B, then your backpack is well designed for comfort and safety. When it is time to go shopping for a new backpack, remember to look for these ergonomically designed features. Bring along the books, etc. that you usually carry in your backpack. Try on the backpack with the typical weight & articles that you usually carry, so you will know for sure how it feels and if the articles fit. Resist buying a backpack that is extra large, because you’ll be tempted to carry more than you really need to. Use the compression straps to keep articles stable inside the backpack and to shift the load as close to your back as possible. You should look for all ergonomic features that are listed in Section B.

Am I Wearing My Backpack Correctly?

Wearing your backpack correctly will promote wellness and prevent injury. The more questions that you answered “YES” to in Section C, the more you understand about backpack safety. In order to wear your backpack correctly, simply follow the suggestions listed under Section C.

Backpack Safety: Final Thoughts

Improper backpack use and/or backpack design have been shown to be factors leading to back pain and possibly injury. With a little information and proper decision-making, we all can take strides toward alleviating back problems through proper backpack education.

If you are having back or neck pain, call the Physical Therapy Department at UHS (865-7381) for further information, or see your health care provider for a Physical Therapy referral.

Test Results and Advice Nurse

Please call the nurse for test results and advice: 863-4463

UHS Clinic Appointments

Appointments can be made in person or by phone. If you are unable to keep your appointment, please call and cancel. Otherwise you will be charged for the visit.

To schedule or cancel appointments, call: 863-0774

For more information about health care issues, visit the UHS Web site at www.sa.psu.edu/uhs

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

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