

Back & Neck Safety Tips for Students & Teachers

Approximately four out of five people will experience back pain some time in their lives. Excessive strain on the spine is not only temporarily uncomfortable, but can be disabling if not treated. Neck and back pain has many causes, including muscle strain, poor posture, and overuse of the back.



Though teachers are in a profession that makes them prone to neck and back pain and students who wear backpacks are a special concern, everyone can take steps to ease minor pain and prevent long-term problems.

Source: Backpack Safety America www.backpacksafe.com and The American Chiropractic Association at www.amerchiro.org.

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CHIROPRACTIC
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Dr. Raymond A. Schmeder

Chiropractic Physician

5525 E. 51st Street, Suite 300

Tulsa, OK 74135-7403

Office: (918) 293-9177 Fax: (918) 388-3604

www.schmederchiropractic.com

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BACK TO SCHOOL

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Healthy Back Tips for Students

With the start of a new school year, most children will soon be stuffing their backpacks with books, homework, and school supplies. But most parents are not aware that backpacks are a leading cause of back and shoulder pain for millions of children. Improper use may lead to long-term back and neck problems. The following guidelines for proper backpack selection and use can help prevent injury later, while keeping kids safe and comfortable now.



Choose the right size

- The proper backpack should not be longer or wider than the child's torso, and it should not hang more than four inches below the waist.
- A backpack with a padded back is best for comfort and for protecting the child from being poked by the sharp edges of school supplies inside the pack.
- The backpack should have two wide, adjustable padded shoulder straps that can be properly set to fit a child's body. The shoulder straps help distribute the weight from the pack evenly between the shoulders.

Pack it properly

- A child should never carry more than 15 percent of his or her body weight in the backpack. For example, a child who weighs 80 pounds should never carry a backpack heavier than 12 pounds.
- Pack the heaviest items closest to the body, and place pointy or bulky objects away from the area that will rest on the child's back.
- Pack only what is needed.
- If the child has to lean or move forward to carry it, it is a sign that the backpack is overloaded.

Put it on the right way

- The child should face the pack and bend at the knees to lift it.
- Then, lifting with the legs, the child should slip into one shoulder strap and then the other. The child should use both hands and check the weight of the backpack before putting it on.
- The pack should never be slung over one shoulder while being lifted or carried.

Wear it safely

- Both straps should be worn snugly in order to avoid pain and muscle spasms caused by a disproportionate shift of weight to one side.
- The backpack should be evenly centered in the middle of the child's back, and the waist strap should be used if it is available. The waist strap helps to stabilize the load, preventing possible injury during movement.
- Parents and teachers should ask children to let them know if they are experiencing any pain or other problems resulting from carrying a backpack. If the pain is severe or persistent, seek immediate care from a health care professional, such as a chiropractor.

Healthy Back Tips for Teachers

The specific tasks teachers perform every day, such as being on their feet, sitting at a desk, and writing on a chalkboard, make them especially susceptible to certain back and neck problems. Teachers may not realize that these activities may be causing pain and tension between the shoulders and up into the neck, painful areas in shoulders, and headaches. What's more, teachers' duties could cause excessive strain on the spine, which is not only temporarily uncomfortable, but possibly disabling if not treated.



The following steps can help ease minor pain and prevent long-term problems.

Maintain good posture

- Sitting or standing with incorrect posture puts an unnecessary amount of weight on certain areas of the spine, which can lead to pinched nerves, wear and tear to vertebrae and discs, and loss of flexibility within the spinal column. Correct posture keeps vertebrae and joints properly aligned and helps reduce neck and back pain.

Lift properly

- It is important to be careful when lifting or carrying objects in order to prevent injuring the back. When lifting an object, squat and lift. Use the legs and keep the back straight. If the load is too heavy, get help or use a dolly.

Exercise regularly

Get enough sleep

Maintain a healthy weight

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Although there are many ways to alleviate back pain on one's own, it may be necessary to consult with a chiropractor if the pain is numbing, severe, or does not go away within a few days or weeks. A chiropractic physician may choose to adjust the body or recommend a diet and exercise routine in order to alleviate pain. Nutritional guidance and exercise recommendations along with manipulation to correct proper vertebrae alignment will often lead to substantial progress.

Dr. Raymond A. Schmeder is a chiropractic physician located in Midtown, Tulsa, on 51st Street between Yale and Sheridan. Dr. Schmeder received his Doctor of Chiropractic at the Cleveland Chiropractic College in Kansas City, MO, and is a member of the Oklahoma State Chiropractic Independent Physicians Association.

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