

## **Weighing-In On Backpack Safety—**

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With back-to-school season upon us, parents and students should make sure heavy backpacks are not too much of a burden. Studies suggest as many as two out of five children, ages 11-15, have reported back pain while wearing their backpacks. There is also a higher likelihood for back pain in students whose backpacks weigh 15-20 percent or more of their body weight.

There are some observations concerned parents should make—this process does not have to be difficult, so just remember:

### **Dr. Cooper's Four P's to Backpack Safety**

**Purchasing**—Decrease the likelihood of back pain by considering the weight of the backpack when empty. A canvas backpack will be lighter than a leather one. Look for bags with wide, padded shoulder straps. Narrow straps may dig into the student's shoulders and cause discomfort. Look for "S" shaped shoulder straps which will better fit the contours of the body. Backpacks with waist or chest straps also help keep the load close to the body. Consider a bag with wheels.

**Placement**—Wear both shoulder straps! Also, keep straps snug so the bag is closer to the back. The top of the backpack should be relatively even with the bottom of the neck. The base of the backpack should rest a few inches above the buttock.

**Packing**—Arguably most important **P** to backpack safety. Be mindful to pack the heaviest closest to the back. The 15 percent rule is crucial. The weight of the backpack should be no more than 15 percent of

the student's body weight. Have the student step on a scale and record the weight. Take 15 percent of that weight and that is how heavy the backpack should be.



Now step back on the scale wearing the backpack and make sure the total weight does not exceed their

body weight by 15 percent.

**Pain**—Parents should simply ask their child if they have back pain. Be observant of your child's posture with the backpack on. If the child has to compensate and lean forward at the waist and neck because the backpack is too heavy, intervention may be warranted. A good test is to lighten the student's load and ask them how they feel after two weeks. Most of the time the back pain will subside; however, if it persists, alters sleep or hinders everyday function then it is time to seek the care of a qualified health care practitioner.

To find out more about Backpack Safety, check out the video on the Physical Medicine & Rehab page at [RegionalPhysicians.com](http://RegionalPhysicians.com).

To make an appointment with Jesse Cooper, DC, please call (336) 878-6042.