

IT'S BACKPACK SAFETY TIME

EDINA, MN – Backpacks can be a leading cause of back and shoulder pain for millions of children and adolescents. As students prepare for school, the Minnesota Chiropractic Association (MCA) and the American Spine Foundation (ASF) want to shed light on backpack safety.

The MCA and ASF are offering parents tips on preventing unnecessary backpack pain and injuries.

- **Does the backpack have two wide, padded shoulder straps?** Non-padded straps are not only uncomfortable, but can also place unnecessary pressure on the neck and shoulder muscles.
- **Does your child use both straps?** Lugging a heavy backpack by one strap can cause a disproportionate shift of weight to one side, leading to neck and muscle spasms, low-back pain, and poor posture.
- **Are the shoulder straps adjustable?** The shoulder straps should be adjustable so the backpack can be fitted to your child's body. The backpack should be evenly centered in the middle of your child's back.
- **Size is important.** The backpack should never be wider or longer than your child's torso, and the pack should not hang more than 4 inches below the waistline. A backpack that hangs too low increases the weight on the shoulders, causing your child to lean forward when walking.
- **Does the backpack have a padded back?** A padded back not only provides increased comfort, but also protects your child from being poked by sharp edges on school supplies (pencils, rulers, notebooks, etc.) inside the pack.
- **Does the pack have several compartments?** A backpack with individualized compartments helps position the contents most effectively. Make sure that pointy or bulky objects are packed away from the area that will rest on your child's back, and try to place the heaviest items closest to the body.

The MCA and ASF recommend that parents help children pack their backpacks properly, and make sure children never carry more than 10 percent of their body weight. For example, a child who weights 100 pounds shouldn't carry a backpack heavier than 10 pounds, and a 50-pound child shouldn't carry more than 5 pounds.