

Backpacks

The school health advisory council, Augusta Maine writes:
Members of the American Academy of Orthopedics recently reported seeing an alarming increase in the number of children who are reporting to their primary physicians complaints of back pain resulting from the use of heavy back packs. Many orthopedists feel these can cause clinical problems in school age children if not enough attention is given to decreasing the load children carry daily to school and in school. Muscle fatigue and strain are the most reported symptoms. Children must be taught proper ways to use a backpack to decrease strain on shoulders and backs. They concluded a backpack weighing more than 20% of a child's body weight can cause injury to the child.

Recommended guidelines for children and parents include:

- Not to exceed 20 % of body weight and even less for the young child
- A hip strap for heavier weights
- Padded wide straps and a padded back
- Use of both straps, firmly tightened, thus holding the pack 2 inches above the waist
- Learn and do back strengthening exercises
- Learn and use correct lifting techniques (bend w/ both knees when picking up the pack)
- Place heaviest items closest to the back
- Neatly pack and try to keep items in place
- Keep most books in your locker until needed for class
- Consider a wheeled pack
- Consider asking for a 2nd set of books for home use or only bring the books you know will be needed for the day

The committee goes on to say healthy backs mean healthy children better able to learn.

As a school nurse I can attest to some of the loads these young backs carry daily, including books, clothing, and athletic equipment. SPHS encourages all students to get a locker and utilize it during the school day. Contact the assistant principal's office if your child does not yet have a locker.