



British Columbia
Chiropractic
Association

Dear Parent/Guardian,

“Strapping on the backpack” is a daily ritual for students who struggle to carry the necessities of school: Books, binders and supplies, along with sports gear, food and drinks. Research indicates that there are long-term health risks associated with youth who wear poorly designed backpacks or carry too much weight. In fact, **over 50% of Canadian youth will suffer at least one back pain episode during their school years.** Not only are these injuries painful, they can also directly impact the enjoyment of leisure and sports activities that form a critical part of a young person’s life.

The British Columbia Chiropractic Association is concerned with this alarming trend in avoidable injuries and is teaming up with educators throughout the province to reinforce the **“Pack it Light. Wear it Right”** backpack safety program. We would also like to ask for your help to discuss backpack safety with your children. Choosing the right backpack will drastically reduce the risk of injury and support your child’s physical development. Please find the attached backpack safety tip sheet for more information on what you should look for in a backpack. More information including videos, activity sheets and other resources are available online: bcchiro.com/PackitLight/

As spine experts, chiropractors have a strong interest in ensuring that children do not hurt their backs, necks, and muscles. Chiropractic doctors play an important role in preventative education as well as early detection and care for the treatment of backpack related injuries. If your child has back pain, consult your family chiropractor.

Prevention is key to avoiding injuries. We hope these tips will help give your children the self-confidence to “carry their load” safely and comfortably.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jay Robinson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr. Jay Robinson B.Sc., D.C.
PRESIDENT & CEO
BC CHIROPRACTIC ASSOCIATION

Pack it Light. Wear it Right.

Backpack Safety Tips

- Elementary school students should not carry more than 10% of their body weight. Secondary school students should avoid carrying weight exceeding 15% of their body weight. (e.g. If your child is 80 pounds, they shouldn't carry more than eight pounds - or the equivalent of a pair of shoes, a snack, drink, and 2-3 textbooks)
- Backpacks should be made of the lightweight materials. Vinyl and canvas are much better than leather.
- Backpacks with two wide straps (at least 2 inches) distribute weight better than bags that are slung over the shoulder. Function should take precedence over fashion.
- The top of the backpack should not extend higher than the top of the shoulder and the bottom should not fall below the top of the hipbone.
- Try the backpack on for fit and comfort: ensure it's not too snug around the shoulders and armpits, and that it's proportionate to the wearer's body type.
- A hip strap or waist belt can take as much as 50-70% of the weight off the shoulders and spine. The waist belt will equalize the strain on the bones, joints, and muscles.
- Students should pack the heaviest items closest to the body so that the weight is nearest the body's own centre of gravity.
- A backpack that is too heavy or rides too low causes one to lean forward and can put extra strain on the back.
- Both straps are critical to avoiding injury- as slinging the pack on one-side causes the spine to lean, increasing the likelihood of middle and lower back problems that can worsen later in life.
- The best way to put on a pack is to place it on a desk or table at waist height and then slip it on. Avoid twisting!