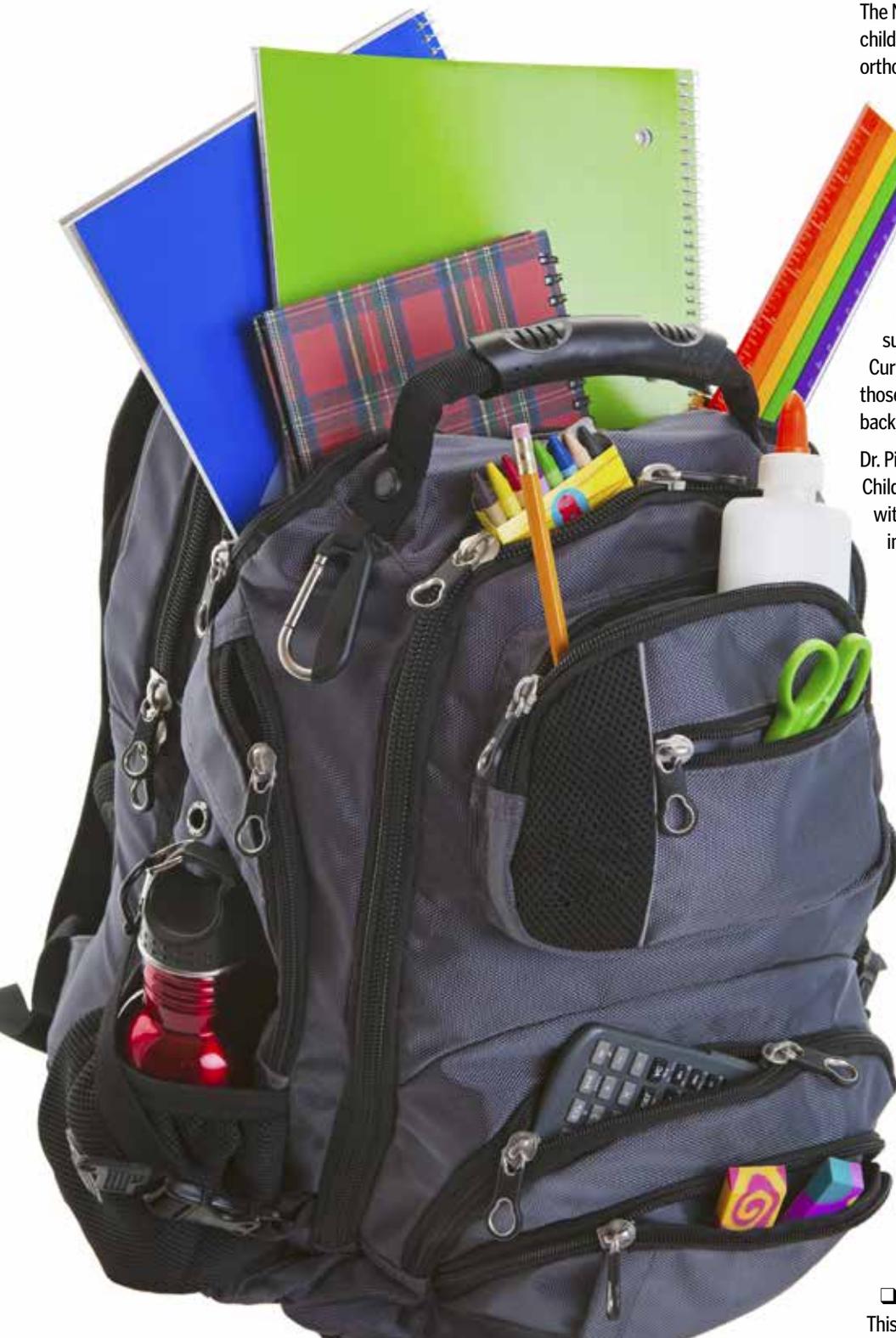


Carrying The Burden

Parents: Be aware what your child's backpack weighs



The New York Times reports that heavy backpacks carried by children are creating low back pain, accidents and very serious orthopedic damage to our kids. The American Chiropractic Association recommends that backpacks should weigh 5 to 10 percent of the child's weight. For a 60-pound child, a backpack should weigh a maximum of six pounds. In a study done in March of 2012 in the Archives of Diseases in Childhood, researchers found that more than 60 percent of students were carrying backpacks weighing more than 10 percent of their body weight and one in five had bags more than 15 percent their own weight. Of the kids studied, one in four suffered back pain for more than 15 days the previous year. Curvature of the spine or scoliosis accounted for 70 percent of those with pain, and the remaining 30 percent had either low back pain or continuous muscle spasm.

Dr. Pierre D' Hemecourt, a sports medicine specialist at Children's Hospital in Boston, states that the risks associated with heavy backpacks are stress fractures in the back, inflammation of growth cartilage, back and neck strain, and nerve damage in the neck and shoulders.

When a backpack is too heavy, a child has to lean forward when walking; at minimum, this will create poor posture and chronically rounded shoulders. If these kids lift their heads to see where they are going, neck pain and pinched nerves result. In addition to backpacks, our children also are often carrying band instruments and school projects to and from school.

If ever there were a reason to check your child's backpack, this would be it.

What can parents do to ease their children's burden?

- Choose a well-designed backpack and adjust it to fit properly on your child's back.
- Choose a backpack that is no bigger than necessary. The more room in the backpack, the more stuff your child will put into it.
- The backpack should have wide, padded adjustable shoulder straps, a padded back and compartments within, so the heaviest items can rest against the child's back. A waist strap would be a good addition, if the child would actually use it. The shoulder straps should be adjusted so that bottom of the pack, when filled, is no lower than four inches below the waist.
- Kids should not carry their backpacks on one shoulder. This is a primary cause of spinal curvature or scoliosis.

❑ Take your child's backpack when they come home from school. Weigh it. You will be surprised by how heavy it is. Next, inventory everything in the backpack. Check the inventory with their assignments for the day. Do they really need all those books? Check with the child's teacher to find out what items really need to be carried back and forth each day.

❑ Most teachers will tell you that kids don't have to take that much home at night. Children don't take the time at their lockers to sort out what they really need to take home. Another option is to get a set of text books for home. Some kids have their backpack stuffed with everything except what is needed for homework. Most schools will help you with a second set of textbooks.

❑ Some children carry their books around all day. Instead of carrying the books all day, they should stop between classes at their lockers and take just the books that are needed for the next class, or two and leave the rest in their locker.

The heavy backpack issue may resolve itself with e-textbooks and learning materials. Some current high school students are instructed to get a laptop computer or notebook for high school work. Some schools also have computers the kids can use if they cannot afford one. E-textbooks will probably be a reality within the next two to three years, but in the meantime, we still struggle with the heavy backpack issue.

Dr. Hufnagle at Agape Chiropractic & Massage Center is committed to helping you with your child's health concerns. She has been treating children with back and neck conditions for 26 years.

She will continue to share information with you concerning children's health as well as other health issues. If you would like Dr. Hufnagle to evaluate your child and his/her backpack, please call the office and Dr. Hufnagle would be happy to provide this service at no charge to you.

A WEALTH OF HEALTH

Dr. Kathleen Hufnagle and staff at Agape Chiropractic & Massage Center in Lake Villa have been committed to helping clients keep healthy for the last 26 years. If you would like more information, or to schedule your free consultation please call Agape Chiropractic & Massage Center at 847-356-9696.



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