

# Hold The Purse Strings!

## Is the pain in your back from your purse?

An article done by the New York Times reports that the big purses — the latest fashion trend — are overfilled.

These overstuffed bags are causing us to walk lopsided and can lead to neck, shoulder, low back, hip pain and headaches.

### *So, what is happening to our bodies when we carry large purses?*

- Your natural gait is affected. The gait is the way your arms and legs swing when you walk. When you put a bag on one side of the body, the arm on that side cannot swing normally and the other arm has to swing more to compensate.
- Your muscles are off balance. Because all the weight is on one shoulder, your posture suffers. Most people carry purses on their dominant side. This causes the muscles on that side to develop more, causing one shoulder to be higher than the other. This asymmetric load can cause the opposite side of the back to go into spasms to compensate for that weight. The more asymmetric the load, the harder everything below the shoulder has to work.

Over time, the muscles that go from your shoulder to the base of your neck become tight and stiff, which can cause a decreased curve in the neck known as “military neck.” This can lead to arthritis, making it difficult to turn your head. It also can create headaches.

### *So how can we make a fashion statement without sacrificing our bodies? The following are some suggestions to fix the damage of heavy handbags.*

- **Reduce the weight of your purse.** The recommendation by the American Chiropractic Association is that bags should weigh no more than five percent of your body weight. But the contents of the purse are only part of the problem. You also need to look at the purse itself. Big zippers, studs and the fabric of the purse can add extra weight.
- **Look for purses with wider straps.** A wider strap is better, because it distributes the weight of the bag over a wider area.
- **Choose a bag with alternative strap options.** Two examples of this are longer straps that cross the body for better weight distribution, or one with handles you can hold in your hand.

• **Choose a bag that is right for your body.** If the handles are too short it will affect the way your arms swing, and if it is too long it will affect the way your hips swing when you walk.

• **Pay attention to your footwear.** The combination of high heels and heavy purses is not a positive one. The heels cause your pelvis to tilt forward which can create back pain. When you add a heavy purse, you magnify the possibility for chronic pain and potential injury.

• **Get regular exercise,** especially things like stretching, yoga, pilates and light weights. This will make sure the neck and shoulders stay loose, balanced and toned.

• **Consider switching to a smaller purse.** Don't let fashion control you! Even though you want to create a certain look, it is important to think how that look will affect your health.

• **Ask your doctor if he/she gives ergonomic advice.** If your doctor is not well versed in ergonomics and you need more direction, Dr. Hufnagle has the education and expertise to help you.

*If you would like Dr. Hufnagle to evaluate your purse or purses, please call us for a free evaluation at Agape Chiropractic & Massage Center, at 847-356-9696.*

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*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.*

