

# Tips to lighten their loads

**More than half of kids and teens will have back pain from heavy backpacks**

Kids straining under heavy backpacks is all too common come back-to-school time. And Ontario's chiropractors warn that carrying a backpack that's too heavy or wearing it the wrong way can cause bad posture and distortion of the spinal column leading to muscle pain, headaches, back, neck and arm pain, and even nerve damage.

More than half of young people experience at least one episode of lower back pain by their teenage years, often caused by their backpacks.

As parents prep their kids for back-to-school this year, the

Ontario Chiropractic Association's Pack it Light, Wear it Right campaign offers tips for parents to teach their kids how to choose, pack and wear a backpack to avoid back pain in the future.

**1. Choose the right backpack.** Pick a bag made from lightweight material that has two wide, adjustable, padded shoulder straps, along with a hip or waist strap, padded back and plenty of pockets.

Make sure it fits well and that it's not too big.

**2. Pack it properly.**

Drop your filled backpack on the scale: It should weigh no more than 10 to 15 per cent of your

child's body weight. Pack the heaviest objects close to the body, and place bumpy or odd shaped ones on the outside, away from the back.

**3. Wear it the right way.** Carrying a backpack over one shoulder may look cool, but encourage kids to use both shoulder straps, and adjust the pack so it fits snugly to the body. Wearing the waist strap adds stability.

**4. Lift it carefully.** Tell your kids not to just pick up their backpack and throw it over their shoulders.

Teach them to put the pack on a flat surface at waist height and slip on the straps one shoulder at a time. Tell them to lift using their arms and legs and bend at the knees.

**Ontario Chiropractic Association**

