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Back to School and Backpack Safety

Several news stories and articles have appeared speaking to the issue of backpack safety in school children. One article from the Aug. 1, 2007 issue of the Okeechobee News starts off by noting that backpacks can be purchased anywhere, but very few people ask about the construction of these packs. The article suggests that parents ask the following questions. "How wide are the shoulder straps? Does it disperse weight evenly? Does the bag have a waist belt to disperse weight to the hips?"

The Okeechobee News article reports that according to the the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons (AAOS), there are more than 21,000 backpack-related injuries each year. The article notes that increased weight is a major issue. The result, as they suggest, is that, "This increase in weight can be correlated to an increase in children seeing chiropractors."

On July 12, 2007, the California publication, The Acorn, also published a story on backpack safety. In this story they quote Dr. Gerard W. Clum of the Foundation for Chiropractic Progress who advises, "Backpacks weighing more than 15 pounds that are slung over a shoulder produce an imbalance in the rib cage." He continued by saying, "This type of repetitive strain can also initiate arm and hand numbness, headaches or backaches."

The July 20, 2007 Toledo Free Press also ran a story on backpacks where they offered tips by the American Chiropractic Association to "help prevent the needless pain that backpack misuse could cause the students in your household." These tips included:

- Make sure your child's backpack weighs no more than 10 percent of his or her body weight.
- The backpack should never hang more than four inches below the waistline.
- A backpack with individualized compartments helps in positioning the contents most effectively.
- Make sure that pointy or bulky objects are packed away from the area that will rest on your child's back.
- Urge your child to wear both shoulder straps.
- The shoulder straps should be adjustable so the backpack fits to your child's body.
- If the backpack is still too heavy, talk to your child's teacher.**