

Professional Care of:

- Musculoskeletal Injuries
- Back, pelvis & neck problems
- Sports Injuries
- Headaches
- Knee problems/ injuries
- Shoulder problems/ injuries
- Women's Health

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**TEWANTIN
PHYSIOTHERAPY
AND
SPORTS INJURY
CENTRE**

Going Safely Back to School

Australian children are at risk of permanent spinal damage because of incorrectly packed and fitted school backpacks. Carrying a heavy backpack can be a source of chronic strain and can cause shoulder, neck and back pain in children.

'An overloaded or incorrectly-worn backpack creates stress on the spine,' APA President Marcus Dripps said. 'This stress can cause your child to lean too far forward and experience distortion of the natural curve of the spine, rolling their shoulders and causing a more rounded upper-back.'

This painful trend among children isn't surprising when you consider the disproportionate amounts of weight they carry in their backpacks - often slung over just one shoulder. Children not only pack heavy schoolbooks, band instruments and running shoes into their backpacks, many of them also tuck away popular electronics -- such as laptops, mobile phones, MP3 players, and CD players. Many of these kids are carrying a quarter of their body weight over their shoulders for a large portion of the day.

Physiotherapists recommend that a backpack should weigh no more than 10 per cent of a child's body weight. However a recent study, on the incidence of back problems in children aged 12-17 years, found that 61.4% of children carried more than 10 per cent of their bodyweight on their backs on a daily basis*. School can be a challenging time for children, so ensuring they are as comfortable as possible is important to their physical and mental development.

Adult back pain and spinal disorders may stem from childhood activities including carrying a heavily loaded backpack for twelve years or more of schooling. Many of the current bags children are using may be fashionable, but unless they allow for even distribution across the back, they can cause pain.

Some tips to prevent back pain associated with the carrying of heavy backpacks

- Backpacks should be ideally no heavier than 10% of a student weight when packed.
- Make sure the backpack is sturdy and appropriately sized - no wider than the student's chest
- Put comfort and fit at the top of the priority list, rather than good looks
- Choose a backpack with broad, padded shoulder straps
- Use both shoulder straps - never sling the pack over one shoulder
- Use waist straps attached - they are there for a good reason
- Don't wear the backpack any lower than the hollow of the lower back
- Don't overload the backpack - use school lockers and plan homework well in advance
- Place all heavy items at the base of the pack, close to the spine, for a better distribution of the weight

Physiotherapy has been proven to be effective and can restore correct function and relieve pain symptoms associated with the carrying of heavy backpacks.

**Rodriguez-Oviedo, P., et al. (2012). School children's backpacks, back pain and back pathologies. Archives of Disease in Childhood, doi:10.1136/archdischild-2011-301253., rolling their shoulders and causing a more rounded upper-back.'*



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