



August 2009 - Back to School Health and Wellness Tips

Red Flags for Heavy Backpacks

How to Nix the Pain of Heavy Bags for the Sake of Your Spine!

By: Ted Spiker

Kids totter back to school this month beneath massive backpacks. They shouldn't -- and neither should you. Here's how to prevent pains and strains.



Lighten up. Carry no more than 25 percent of your weight in a backpack, which should be cinched against your body so it doesn't swing. Toting 26 pounds (a laptop and a few magazines and files) can cut off blood flow to the arms after just ten minutes, leading to fatigue and loss of finger mobility.

Keep the object close to your body, especially while squatting and lifting, says Kevin Gill, MD, co-director of the University of Texas Southwestern Spine Center. And skip lumbar supports (back braces often used by people who do heavy lifting). A recent review shows they don't prevent lower-back pain.

Additional Wellness Tips

It doesn't take an expert to tell you that kids who feel good about themselves get more out of every day school. Below are a few more tips for keeping your child well during the school year.

Promote physical fitness. Good nutrition, plenty of exercise and lots of good sleep gives them energy to burn, learn and grow. Sign kids up for a sport or send them out to ride bikes or walk the dog. If you live near school, skip the bus and walk your child to class.

Encourage curiosity. New discoveries build problem-solving skills, stretch the mind, and spark creativity.

Express and acknowledge feelings. Learning how to identify and deal with feelings helps kids feel safe, minimize stress, and work and play well with others.

Encourage social involvement. Contributing and participating -- sharing sports, clubs and activities with others, or lending someone a helping hand -- helps kids feel like they belong.



Celebrate skills and successes. Good self-esteem grows when kids are recognized not only for their achievements but also for their unique skills and abilities.

Schedule sleep. Avoid lost zzz's by having your child gradually go to bed and get up earlier during the week or two before classes start. Nixing big meals and caffeine before bedtime may also help.

Mind the menu. For lunches, focus on fruits, veggies, dairy and whole grains.



Sources

Readers Digest: www.rd.com

Edgewood Center for Children and Families: <http://www.edgewood.org/>

