

Backpack Safety Tips from ATI Physical Therapy

As a new school year approaches and back-to-school shopping kicks into high gear, experts at ATI Physical Therapy want to help make this a fun and exciting time for parents and students by sharing a few important backpack safety tips to help ensure safety remains a priority.

With backpacks becoming increasingly popular for hauling laptops, tablets and other heavier equipment, our bodies are left to suffer. Over time, incorrectly wearing and even packing your backpack can do serious harm to one's health, specifically the neck and back muscles as well as the spine. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission reported that backpack-related injuries sent more than 10,000 people to the emergency room in one year's time.

For younger adults, whose bodies are still developing, proper support is extremely important. Putting a lot of weight on the frame can cause the spine to compress unnaturally, which can lead to serious health complications down the road. Adults are not immune to strains of improperly carrying a backpack either. Though an adult's core muscles are more developed, carrying an unnecessary load, typically more than 15% of your body weight, can lead to serious strain on various muscles, ligaments and joints. These simple safety tips will help protect the body from the potential implications of improper backpack use.

It's all in the fit

Your backpack should not be wider than your torso. The shoulder strap anchor points shouldn't extend beyond one to two inches below the top of your shoulders. And the bottom of your bag shouldn't extend any further than one to two inches below your waist line. When fastening the straps, they should fit snugly to the torso/shoulders.

The more padding, the better

Choose a backpack with wide, padded adjustable shoulder straps and a padded back panel to help minimize direct pressure on the back.

Strap in

It's important to wear both shoulder straps as well as the waist strap to help balance weight distribution. While it seems like a convenient thing to do, only throwing one strap over the shoulder will offset your center of balance, causing you to excessively lean the opposite direction to prevent the bag from falling. This will increase the likelihood of lower and upper back pain and strain to your shoulders and neck.

Ditch the unnecessary weight

Experts at ATI recommend carrying no more than 10-15% of your body weight in the bag. Carrying capacity of the bag is especially important. By carrying more, you are forcing your shoulders, neck and back to work beyond their desired capacity and can potentially put them at risk for injury. For example, for a 90 pound child heading off the school, the heaviest the bag should weigh is 14 pounds. A good rule of thumb is that if you are having trouble lifting the bag to position it on your back, it's probably too heavy.

Pack with a purpose

Choose a backpack with multiple compartments to help balance the load. Be sure to pack the heavier items lower and towards the center of the bag – near your center of gravity.

Posture is key

When picking up your bag, keep your spine in a neutral (non-hunched) position and lift using your legs. When carrying items, be sure to have the pack fit snugly against your body to reduce unwanted swaying, shifting of your items, or friction to your skin.

Whether packing up for another day at school, commuting to work or heading out on the adventure trail, be sure your bag is equipped to handle the load and packed in a manner that won't damage your body. Anyone with back or neck pain knows how restricting it can be on your daily life, so do your body a favor and think twice before attempting to carry the weight of the world on your shoulders.

If you frequently use a backpack and are experiencing any back or neck pains, strains or discomfort, find your nearest ATI clinic and request a complimentary screening where one of our licensed providers will assess your areas of discomfort and provide next-step suggestions in care.

For more information on ATI Physical Therapy, and a complete list of ATI's clinic locations and services, please visit [ATipt.com](https://www.atipt.com). You can also follow @ATIPhysicalTherapy on [Facebook](#) and @ATIPT on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and [Pinterest](#). Or subscribe to the official [ATI YouTube Channel](#) for a glimpse into our world!

About ATI Physical Therapy

ATI is a privately held, nationally recognized healthcare company, specializing in outpatient rehabilitation and adjacent healthcare services. With a focus on delivering a remarkable experience to every patient, every day, ATI has more than 700 locations from coast to coast. ATI was named "Best Physical Therapy Practice in the Nation" by *ADVANCE* magazine, and was one of the first physical therapy companies in the country to achieve URAC Core Accreditation, a mark of distinction that recognizes its commitment to quality healthcare. Based in Bolingbrook, Illinois, ATI gives back to communities across the country through the ATI Foundation, a non-profit established by ATI, which has provided more than \$4 million in resources and funding to children with physical impairments. For more information on ATI Physical Therapy, and a complete list of clinic locations, services and the ATI Foundation, please visit [ATipt.com](https://www.atipt.com).

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