Pack it Light. Wear it Right.

Kids think it's "cool" to strap on their backpacks and head out to school. But if they don't know exactly how to choose, load, lift and wear them – these all-important accessories can be a pain in the back. Literally. Not to mention the neck, head, and shoulders.

Backpacks can affect your children's health

 Carrying a heavy load that is unevenly or improperly distributed can result in poor posture; and even distort the spinal column, throwing it out of alignment. This can cause muscle strain, headaches, back, neck and arm pain, and even nerve damage.

For example, a heavy backpack, carried on one shoulder, forces the muscles and spine to compensate for the uneven weight. This places stress on the mid and lower back, and may increase the likelihood of back problems later in life.

Prevention is key

Here are a few pointers to help you help your school age children carry their load comfortably and safely.

Choose the right backpack:

 Forget leather! It looks great, but it's far too heavy. Go for vinyl or canvas. Pick a pack that has two wide, adjustable, padded shoulder straps, along with a hip or waist strap, padded back and plenty of pockets. Make sure the pack fits properly, is not too snug around the arms and under the armpits, and that its size is proportionate to the wearer's body.

Packing it properly:

They're not moving out! Make sure your children's packs contain only what is needed for that day, and that the weight is distributed evenly. It's a good idea to know roughly what

 More than 50 per cent of young people experience at least one episode of lower back pain by their teenage years. Research indicates that this could be caused, to a great extent, by improper use of backpacks.

If your child does complain of back pain, numbness or weakness in his or her arms and legs, get help to prevent future problems.

each item weighs. The total weight of the filled pack should be no more than 10 to 15 per cent of the wearer's own body weight. Pack heaviest objects close to the body, and place bumpy or oddshaped ones on the outside, away from the back.

Putting the backpack on:

 It's a good idea to help young children with this, at least the first few times. Put the pack on a flat surface, at waist height. Slip on the pack, one shoulder at a time, then adjust the straps to fit comfortably. Remember when lifting a backpack, or anything, to lift using the arms and legs and to bend at the knees.

The right way to wear a backpack:

Both shoulder straps should be used, and adjusted so that the pack fits snugly to the body, without dangling to the side. Backpacks should never be worn over just one shoulder. You should be able to slide your hand between the backpack and your child's back. The waist strap should also be worn for added stability.

What is a chiropractor?

Chiropractors are regulated primary health care providers like doctors, dentists and optometrists.

This means they can see you without a referral from another health care provider. In Canada, chiropractors are required to complete a minimum of three years of university, followed by four intensive years of training at an accredited chiropractic college.Their training enables them to assess, diagnose and treat disorders related to the spine, nervous system and joints.

What is a chiropractor?

The word chiropractic comes from Greek, and means "treatment by hand."

Chiropractic care is a highly skilled treatment carried out by trained professionals. It focuses on the source of the pain, not just the symptoms.

Chiropractors have long recognized that carrying a heavy book bag or backpack is a spinal health hazard. One that leads to altered posture and gait. Effects can be cumulative over time. Chiropractors play an important role in providing preventative education and early detection as well as providing chiropractic care in the treatment of backpack related injuries.

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