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TWO WEEKS UNTIL NATIONAL SCHOOL BACKPACK AWARENESS DAY

Studies Show 6 in 10 Students Suffer Chronic Back Pain Related to Backpacks

Bethesda, MD – With 2 weeks to go until the annual **National School Backpack Awareness Day**, occupational therapy practitioners across the United States are gearing up to help students “Pack It Light, Wear It Right!.” The event, sponsored by the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), is set for **Wednesday, September 19, 2007**.

Occupational therapy practitioners, researchers, and students are holding events across the United States to educate students on the proper way to wear a backpack and how much weight to carry. More than 40 million students in the United States carry backpacks. According to one study, 6 out of 10 students ages 9-20 reported chronic back pain related to backpacks.

AOTA has published 10 tips to avoid backpack-related health problems:

1. **Never let a child carry more than 15% of his or her body weight.** This means a child who weighs 100 pounds shouldn't wear a backpack heavier than 15 pounds.
2. **Load heaviest items closest to the child's back** and arrange books and materials to prevent them from sliding.
3. **Always wear both shoulder straps.** Wearing only one strap can cause a child to lean to one side, curving the spine and causing pain or discomfort.
4. **Select a pack with well-padded shoulder straps.** Too much pressure on shoulders and necks can cause pain and tingling.
5. **Adjust the shoulder straps so that the pack fits snugly to the child's back.** The bottom of the pack should rest in the curve of the lower back, never more than four inches below the child's waistline.
6. **Wear the waist belt,** if the backpack has one, to help distribute the pack's weight more evenly.
7. **Check what your child carries to school and brings home** to make sure the items are necessary to the day's activities.

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8. **If the backpack is too heavy, consider using a book bag on wheels** if your child's school allows it.
9. **Choose the right size pack** for your child's back as well as one with enough room for necessary school items.
10. **If a student is experiencing back pain or neck soreness, consult your doctor or occupational therapist.**

Teaching proper backpack ergonomics is just one of the many ways occupational therapy practitioners can help students stay healthy and succeed in school. Occupational therapists also have expertise in correcting handwriting problems, helping children learn social skills, and teaching students effective and efficient ways to learn in school. These health care professionals work with students in every school district in the country.

Find out more about [National School Backpack Awareness Day](#) and contact the AOTA press office to connect with a local backpack event in your area.

The American Occupational Therapy Association, established in 1917, represents more than 35,000 members. AOTA is an active advocate for the profession, and for individuals who can benefit from occupational therapy services.