

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Choose the Right Backpack to Prevent Injuries

PENSACOLA, Fla. — With the start of the school year upon us, families are picking out new backpacks and stocking them with school supplies. But as helpful as backpacks can be, wearing them incorrectly can lead to health issues such as the development of poor posture, as well as severe pain in the back, neck and shoulders.

“If you’ve noticed your child struggling with a backpack, bending forward while carrying it or complaining of tingling or numbness, those are all warning signs to beware of,” said [Robert Huang, MD](#), pediatric orthopedic surgeon at The Studer Family Children’s Hospital at Sacred Heart.

Dr. Huang recommends these tips to help pick the right backpack for your child:

1. Start with a lightweight material. An empty backpack should not weigh much.
2. Find just the right size. A big bag may seem efficient, but having more space increases the odds your child will carry unneeded items.
3. Choose bags with two shoulder straps, and wear the backpack with both straps at all times. Two straps help distribute weight evenly, keeping your child balanced, avoiding falls and minimizing strain to the neck, shoulder and back muscles. Shoulder straps should be wide and padded to give your child needed support. Narrow straps can dig into the shoulders and restrict circulation.
4. Look for a padded back to provide additional support and protect against sharp edges on objects inside the backpack.
5. Make sure the bag has a waist strap, which holds the bag closer to the child’s back, helping maintain balance and distribute a heavy load more evenly.
6. Compartments on backpacks help distribute the weight of the items inside. The heaviest items should be packed low, closest to the center of the bag.

Once you’ve picked a backpack, remember to pack light. A backpack should weigh no more than 10 to 15 percent of your child’s weight. Anything more will force the child to slouch in order to keep balanced. Only pack items that are necessary. While at school, stop often at a locker rather than carrying all the books needed for the day. Carry heavier items in your arms, if possible.

Do not bend over at the waist when wearing or lifting a heavy backpack. Bend using both knees, when you bend down.

Backpacks with wheels may help in some situations but present a challenge to carry upstairs and should only be used in a limited basis, since they clutter hallways and increase the chance of tripping.

For questions or concerns, please contact [pediatric orthopedics](mailto:pediatric_orthopedics@sacredheartmedicalgroup.com) at 850-416-1575 or sacredheartmedicalgroup.com.

The Studer Family Children's Hospital at Sacred Heart is a 117-bed facility that serves as the only children's hospital in Northwest Florida. The Children's Hospital offers a wide range of services to meet all of a child's medical needs, from a pediatric emergency room and neonatal intensive care unit to a medical staff of more than 120 board-certified physicians across 30 pediatric specialties. The Children's Hospital provides quality, compassionate care to children, regardless of their parents' ability to pay. Sacred Heart Health System is a member of Ascension, the largest non-profit health system in the U.S. and the world's largest Catholic health system. For more information about the services available at The Studer Family Children's Hospital at Sacred Heart, visit studerfamilychildrenshospital.com.

About Sacred Heart Health System

In Florida, Ascension operates Sacred Heart Health based in Pensacola and St. Vincent's HealthCare based in Jacksonville. Together, Ascension operates seven hospitals and more than 100 other sites of care, and they employ nearly 10,000 associates. Across the region, Sacred Heart and St. Vincent's have served North Florida communities for more than 145 years. In fiscal year 2017, they provided \$168 million in community benefit and care of persons living in poverty. Ascension (www.ascension.org) is a faith-based healthcare organization dedicated to transformation through innovation across the continuum of care. As the largest non-profit health system in the U.S. and the world's largest Catholic health system, Ascension is committed to delivering compassionate, personalized care to all, with special attention to persons living in poverty and those most vulnerable. Ascension includes approximately 165,000 associates and 34,000 aligned providers. Ascension's Healthcare Division operates more than 2,600 sites of care – including 153 hospitals and more than 50 senior living facilities – in 22 states and the District of Columbia. For more information on Sacred Heart Health System, visit www.sacred-heart.org.

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