

# And the Kitchen Sink!

By Kate Ross

I recently snuck a peek inside my daughter's locker after a meeting we both attended at U-32. I was quite surprised to see about five pairs of shoes and assorted articles of clothing, but no books. I briefly wondered why the kitchen sink wasn't included . . .

"The average student carries a backpack weighing almost one fourth of his or her body weight. Three out of ten students typically carry backpacks that weigh up to 1/3 of their own body weight at least once a week," informs the American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc.'s (AOTA) website ([www.aota.org](http://www.aota.org)).

Where were my daughter's textbooks? In her backpack! What happened to the days when lockers were used for storing books – awaiting student arrival the next day? Appears, at least for her, that most textbooks are carried daily between home and school — a point that the AOTA wishes to make known to teachers at all levels.

According to the AOTA, several important factors to consider when purchasing an appropriate backpack are:

- Child's size and age
- Well-padded shoulder straps - provide cushioning (The neck and shoulders are filled with blood vessels and nerves. Constriction can cause pain and tingling sensations in the hands, arms, and neck.)
- A waist-belt - provides extra support and transfers weight to the trunk and hips
- Wheels!
- Properly loading a pack is also crucial. These guidelines are offered:
  - Children should carry no more than 15% (1/6) of own body weight. For example, a child weighing 100 pounds can carry 15 pounds; 120 pounds person can carry 18 pounds, and 140 pounds person can carry 21 pounds.
  - Heaviest items should be placed closest to the child's back.
  - Neatly organize materials within the pack and always wear both shoulder straps. This distributes the weight evenly.
  - Adjust the shoulder straps to fit snugly to the child's back, preferably resting the pack in the

## backpack from page 1

In a study performed on American students ages 9 – 20 years, 6 out of 10 reported chronic back pain related to heavy backpacks. What will this pose for the future adult work force within America? A sobering thought.

What can be done? The adolescent spine continues to grow until the age of 18 years. Properly carrying backpacks now is vital! “Pack it Light, Wear it Right” – a campaign motto set forth by the AOTA is where it’s at. If you have to carry your child’s backpack to the car or bus each day, re-think! Follow the guidelines above – consult with teachers if you see students coming home with many heavy textbooks. Lighten the load on both sides – home and school!

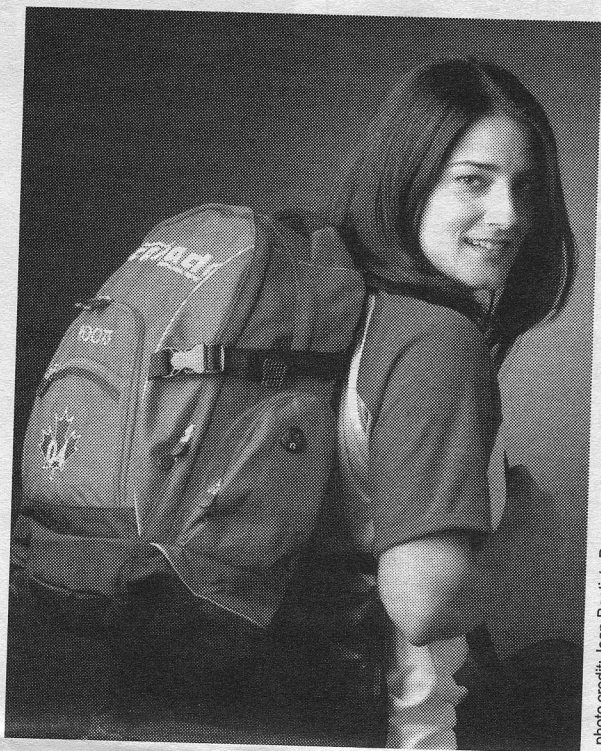


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