

6 tips for choosing the right backpack

Over the years there have been repeated warning from Health Care professional bodies that heavy backpacks can cause injuries to children. Minimising the weight and strain they can have on your child is even more important when they have JIA.

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Even after finding a well-fitting backpack, your child may still silently suffer from shoulder and back pain. No matter how well a backpack is packed, there will still be a decent amount of pressure on the spine and shoulders. Even a light load can cause intense pain when your child is in a flare.

Beyond investing in a rolling backpack, the only thing that will make it better is to lighten the load. I recommend talking with your child's teachers to work out a plan, so they have a set of textbooks at home and in the classroom. Older kids may even be able to carry around an iPad or small laptop and use an e-textbook.

Going to school can be hard for kids with JIA, whether they struggle to walk to their next class or take notes. The worst part was carrying books; an overloaded backpack can cause a lot of pain and issues with posture. Over the years there have been repeated warning from Health Care professional bodies that heavy backpacks can cause injuries to children. Backpacks that are too heavy or are worn incorrectly can cause problems for children and teenagers. Improperly used backpacks may injure

muscles and joints. This can lead to severe back and shoulder pain, as well as posture problems. Thankfully, children with JIA have more options than ever before to avoid strain from heavy backpacks and these options should always be used.

The weight of binders, notebooks, and folders can be intense. Even though they look cool, don't use messenger bags because they put too much pressure on one shoulder. Backpacks with wide shoulder pads, padded backs, and waist straps can also help. Children cannot focus, participate, or enjoy their classes if they are struggling with pain.

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1. Wide, padded shoulder straps — Narrow straps can dig into shoulders. This can cause pain and restrict circulation.
2. Two shoulder straps — Backpacks with one shoulder strap that runs across the body cannot distribute weight evenly.
3. Padded back — A padded back protects against sharp edges on objects inside the pack and increases comfort.
4. Waist strap — A waist strap can distribute the weight of a heavy load more evenly.
5. Lightweight backpack — The backpack itself should not add much weight to the load.
6. Rolling backpack — This type of backpack may be a good choice for students who must tote a heavy load. Remember that rolling backpacks still must be carried upstairs. They may be difficult to roll in the snow.

6 tips on preventing backpack-related injuries

1. Always use both shoulder straps. Slinging a backpack over one shoulder can strain muscles. Wearing a backpack on one shoulder may increase the curvature of the spine.
2. Tighten the straps so that the pack is close to the body. The straps should hold the pack two inches above the waist.
3. Make sure your child's backpack weighs no more than 10 percent of his or her body weight. A heavier backpack will cause your child to bend forward in an attempt to support the weight on his or her back, rather than on the shoulders, by the straps.
4. Organise the backpack to use all of its compartments. Pack heavier items closest to the centre of the back.
5. Stop often at school lockers, if possible. Do not carry all of the books needed for the day.
6. Use both knees to bend down with a backpack on. Do not bend over at the waist when wearing or lifting a heavy backpack.

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