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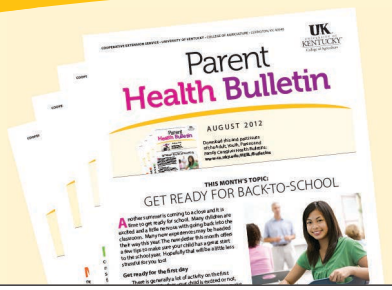
UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND ENVIRONMENT, LEXINGTON, KY 40546

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY
College of Agriculture, Food and Environment

Parent Health Bulletin



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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

BACKPACK SAFETY

It is that time of year when you and your family are probably settling down to the family homework routine. Do you ever worry about the number of books, binders, notebooks and folders that your child brings home? Backpacks certainly make it easier for your child to bring home what he or she needs to complete homework. However, when not worn properly, a backpack can cause back and neck aches and pains. According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, there are more than 2,000 backpack related injuries each year treated by a healthcare provider. The University of California asked students ages 11-15 if their backs hurt when they wore backpacks and 64 percent said, yes.

There are several ways you can help protect your child from a back or neck injury due to a backpack:

- **Look at how your child is wearing his or her backpack.** Both shoulder straps should

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Continued from page 1

be worn. This helps spread the weight of the backpack's contents more evenly across the body.

- **Look at where the backpack fits on the body.** The top of the backpack should sit approximately 2 inches from the top of the shoulders. The bottom of the bag should be at the waist or slightly above the waist. Spend some time adjusting the straps so that the backpack fits correctly. Remember that as your child grows, you may need to get a better fitting backpack.
- **Talk to your child about how he or she loads everything into the backpack.** The heaviest items should be placed toward the back of the bag, the part that will be closest to the body. This will lessen the strain of carrying a heavy backpack.
- **If your child always has a very full backpack, ask if there are one or two items that can be carried by hand.** This will lessen the overall weight. In fact, it is recommended that a full backpack should weight no more than 10-15 percent of your child's weight. If your child weighs 75 pounds the backpack should weigh between 7.5 and 11 pounds.

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, there are more than 2,000 backpack related injuries each year treated by a healthcare provider.

- **You may also want to talk to your child about what to do with the backpack when it is not on his or her back.** When the bags are very heavy and full, it may be easy to bump into other people or things. It is also important to talk to your child about keeping the backpack out of walkways and places where others can trip over it. Encourage your child to pick a place to put his or her backpack every day. That way, everyone knows where it is in the morning when everyone is rushing to start the day.

Backpacks certainly allow for children to bring home the items that they need to complete homework assignments. But when backpacks are not worn properly, there can be an increased chance for injury. Make sure to talk to your child about their backpack and make sure your child is practicing backpack safety.

SOURCES:

- Nemours Kidshealth. (2013). Backpacks. http://kidshealth.org/kid/homework/health/backpack.html
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