

## Love Your Backpack

By Thomas J. Haverbush, M.D.  
Orthopaedic Surgeon

Backpacks are wonderful helpers if you know how to use them right.

They are a convenient way for children to carry stuff for school and activities and they are affordable and easily available.

If you don't know how to use backpacks they can be a pain in the . . . back.

Since backpacks are here to stay what advice do I give to parents?

Get a lightweight, sturdy one from places that specialize in hiking and outdoor equipment. Why? They may cost a little more, but they have several features designed to minimize discomfort. They have wide shoulder straps and an internal frame that provides rigidity to the backpack. These things help to distribute weight evenly over the back. A waist belt is also important. Why? Get this; a waist strap is known to transfer 90% of the weight onto the hips and they are mechanically better able to carry the load than your back.

Some packs even have lumbar pads, which rest in the curve of the back and supply extra support.

A good rule is a backpack weight limit of 15% of body weight.

Wear it over both shoulders, not just one as some kids do.

Wear it high on the back to decrease strain in the lower back.

Occasionally back pain in children can be from psychological or social factors, but I would never want to call back pain in children that kind of a problem without ruling out other causes which can be very serious.

Some children are out of shape. Therapists call it weak core stability. Poor posture, sedentary lifestyle, heavy backpacks. Back says ouch!

A good posture strengthening exercise for kids is to stand holding a sturdy book on the head. Push the head up into the weight of the book. Then when standing as straight as they can raise the book over the head with both hands ten times. This strengthens back and scapular muscles.

Lastly a novel device is the BackTpack that was designed as an alternative to backpacks. It is worn like a vest and has side bags that distribute weight to both sides of the body rather than the back.

All Orthopaedic Surgery problems including those of children can be evaluated by Dr. Haverbush at the Lakeview Community Wellness Center in Lakeview or at the office in Alma at 315 Warwick Dr., Alma, Michigan.

Please call 989-463-6092 for information or to schedule an appointment.

Future Lakeview Community Wellness Center Clinic dates are April 17 and May 1, 2009.

Please don't forget there is a wealth of accurate information about all the Orthopaedic conditions I treat on the office teaching website [www.orthopodsurgeon.com](http://www.orthopodsurgeon.com). Please log on and check it out.

We are happy to answer questions from readers. You can e-mail me at [orthopodsurgeon@hotmail.com](mailto:orthopodsurgeon@hotmail.com) or write to me at 315 Warwick Dr., Alma, Michigan 48801.

Our goal is simple - To help people return to more pain free functional lives.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush