

BACKBREAKING

Studies show weight of heavy backpacks students wear can effect their futures; Chiropractors suggest students should not carry more than 10-15 percent of their body weight on their backs

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Before Ashley Talesky, senior, weighed her backpack, the heaviest possible number she thought it could weigh was ten pounds.

Although the backpack only held a laptop and a couple of notebooks inside, after putting it on the scale, the numbers steadily rose to a "shocking" 18 pounds.

"Immediately when you put it on, it is like carrying a small child on your back, maybe even twice that," Ashley said. "Every time you put it back on its worse and it seems heavier, I get headaches all the time from the pressure on my shoulders."

When heavy weight is placed on the shoulders in the wrong way, it forces the back to bend backwards. To compensate, students lean forward at the hips or arch their backs.

Over time, this causes the shoulders to become rounded and the upper back to become curved. In addition, the spine and intervertebral discs compress unnaturally, according to Teens Health Organization.

Repeatedly doing these actions for years on end can even lead to long term damage, according to Dr. Rae Bouvin, Chiropractic Physician in Chicago.

"Number one, it (heavy backpacks) is stressful on the back," Dr. Bouvin said. "It causes the muscles to get really tight, pinches the nerves in the spine and puts strain on the bones."

Although heavy backpacks cannot directly cause scoliosis, it can further damage someone already diagnosed with scoliosis. It also stands more likely for a student to develop arthritis in the back when they grow older, according to Dr. Bouvin.

Just recently this year, Alyssa Comer, junior, switched over from a regular

backpack to using a rolling backpack.

Although she has had scoliosis since middle school, the heavy backpacks have made her condition worse.

"My back felt really stiff, unpleasant, made me hunch over and painful to wear some of my clothes," Alyssa said. "Sometimes it's hard to navigate around with a rolling backpack, but it's easier than having your back in pain. I walk standing up straighter and I feel a lot more confident."

Data collected from the California State Board of Public Education found that the average combined weight of the four core area textbooks exceeded the recommended maximum of 10-15 percent body weight on a student.

Due to this information presenting a health hazard on students, it lead the State of California to pass Assembly Bill 2532 in 2004. This required the State Board of Public Education to adopt a maximum weight for school textbooks.

However, the State of Indiana does not have regulations on heavy textbooks or backpacks.

Although Alyssa does not think the school should implement a regulation on backpack weight, they should let students leave a set of textbooks at home and in the classrooms.

"It (heavy backpacks) is not fair, it is painful," Alyssa said. "They expect you to get to your locker, use the bathroom and get to your class on time in the seven minute passing periods we have, it's mad."

Dr. Bouvin recommends that if a student feels pain in their back, instead of only taking medicine or ignoring it, they should see a doctor to have their back properly evaluated and cared for.

"If it feels like it is too heavy, then it probably is," Dr. Bouvin said. "Pain is a signal from your body that something is wrong, you must treat your back to correct the problem."

Reality check

Students guess the weight of their backpacks, then weigh them to compare it to the actual weight

Student	Estimated weight	Actual weight
Josh Marcinik, freshman	5 pounds	15 pounds
Abigail Pennanen, sophomore	12 pounds	26 pounds
Jai Dharla, junior	20 pounds	30 pounds
Ashley Talesky, senior	10 pounds	18 pounds

Students speak

Survey shows students' opinion on backpacks

Overweight
Students that say their backpack is too heavy
70.86 %

No space
Students that say they have books that do not fit in their backpack
63.87 %

Showing concern
Students say their parents worry about their backpack weigh
57.09 %

Solving the problem
Students think teachers should have a class set of books to eliminate backpack weight
45.71 %

source: student survey of 501 students



photo illustration by Chelsea Eickleberry