

The best pack for your back

Avoid slouchy shoulders and a bent-over back, learn how to wear the proper backpack

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Whether you suffer from mild shoulder aches or chronic back pain, we have all experienced the hurt of lugging around those much needed university supplies. Sure, those chic shoulder totes and spiffy messenger bags may be aesthetically appealing, but it may just be time to invest in the proper backpack.

For the sake of style we often succumb to impracticalness, but, unlike fashions which are ever-changing, once shoulder and back

injuries occur it's more than likely that the effects will last a lifetime, only to grow progressively worse as you age, of course. So how can you prevent any injuries from occurring?

When choosing the right pack for your back, it's best to have some idea of how your shoulders and back function. Don't fear; this isn't a lesson in kinesiology or the human anatomy (feel free to sigh in relief).

According to Medline Plus, the shoulder joint, which is often strained through use of one-shoulder packs, is made up of three bones: the collarbone, the shoulder blade and the upper arm bone. As the shoulder is one of the most flexible joints in the body it can therefore be quite unstable and thus prone to a variety of injuries. These include easily treatable cases such as sprains and strains, to more serious and possibly lifelong injuries such as dislocations and fractures. However, these are just a few of the many side effects of a strained shoulder, and, worse yet, are back injuries.

The back is both a vast and a complex structure of many bones, muscles and tissues. Consequently, it's quite often the site for numerous injuries that may limit activity in everyday life and, furthermore, result in enduring pain.

According to eHow, to avoid the laborious and near suicidal agony that improper use of packs may result in, a proper backpack should primarily include three features: waist straps, a padded back and padded shoulder straps.

The backpack should fit as high as possible on your back while buckling the waist straps which work to distribute the load of those oh-so-necessary university fundamentals as evenly as possible. Ultimately, this is meant to reduce the impact on your shoulder as well as back, therefore making for a more comfortable carrying experience. Additional padding on the back of your pack will allow for further comfort.

Also, you should adjust your shoulder straps so as to assure that they fit closely against your body while making sure that they aren't fitted too tightly. An easy way to make certain your straps aren't fitted too tightly, or too loosely, is to insert a finger between the strap and your shoulder; this is a good measure of how your pack should be fitted. If there is too much space, or not enough, than adjust your straps accordingly.

Finally, when packing your knapsack, ensure that the heaviest items (your laptop, for example) are against your back. Pack the lightest

items furthest away from your back. In due course, this will reduce the likelihood of potential shoulder and back injuries.

Backpacks also vary in respect to structure. There are four, basic types of backpacks including the day pack, the external-frame pack, the internal-frame pack and the hybrid.

Day packs are quite popular amongst students. They consist of no frame and are often fairly small in size. However, in a practical sense, they aren't the most useful of packs for carrying laptops and books.

External-frame packs are large, hiking type backpacks. They have sturdy, metal frames and as such fit just about anything. However, unless you plan on hiking Mount Kilimanjaro then more than likely this backpack isn't well suited for the average university student.

The internal-frame is the more practical of the two in that it has a frame built into the pack itself. It's primarily designed for comfort as the frame is flexible and the pack is easier to balance in that the bottom is wider-set than the top.

Alternatively, there are hybrid versions of all these bags. So for those who are looking for a safe medium, then a pack combining features of the day pack, the external-frame pack and the internal-frame pack is best.

Remember, backpacks come in unique patterns and colours so find one that fits your personality best. And, in twenty years when you causally run into a fellow alumni and accidentally mistake her for an 80-year old woman, backpacks will no longer seem like the biggest fashion faux pas.



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