



The Weight and Carriage of Schoolbags

1. Reducing bag weight

- ◆ Ensure that your child does not take books and/or copybooks to school that do not form part of the daily timetable.
- ◆ Unnecessary items such as raincoats when the weather is fine, extra stationery, games and toys, are to be avoided.
- ◆ Bulky lunch cases are to be avoided.
- ◆ Lightweight water bottles are to be used.
- ◆ Checking your child's bag goes a long way in reducing the weight of schoolbags.

2. Choice of schoolbags

- ◆ Backpacks, rather than traditional school bags or sports bags, allow the load to be carried evenly over both shoulders.
- ◆ The purchase of well-designed backpacks with well-padded, wide, adjustable shoulder straps helps to prevent back pain.
- ◆ Backpack materials can add to the weight, so the most lightweight but durable options should be considered.
- ◆ Bags should be equipped with two straps and worn on both shoulders.





- ◆ Double-strap backpacks help in ensuring that spinal posture is not altered, even when climbing steps with a load of 10% of body weight. This 10% ratio is recommended by the *Malta Association of Physiotherapists* and the *National Back Pain Association, U.K.*
- ◆ Bags with waist belts are particularly useful when bags are heavy.
- ◆ Bags with wheels are to be avoided if stairs are present since these would need to be carried, hence increasing the risk of injury.
- ◆ A bag that is too big or that has not been adjusted to fit correctly will result in discomfort.
- ◆ Schoolbags with several extra compartments encourage students to carry more items with them to school. It is therefore recommended that backpacks do not have several compartments.



3. Carriage of schoolbags

- ◆ Students are advised to walk to school and back, as a means of keeping fit, while ensuring that their schoolbag does not exceed the recommended 10% of their bodyweight.
- ◆ Your child needs to wear appropriate footwear to school that also prevents back pain during the carriage of schoolbags.

Remind your child that:

- ◆ Bags should be carried about 5cm above the waist.
- ◆ Bags should be carried on both shoulders. This method of carriage requires less effort and encourages better posture than carrying the schoolbag over one shoulder or carrying it in one hand.
- ◆ Bags should be worn by first placing them on a flat surface. In this way, the child could put his/her back to the bag whilst putting his/her arms through the straps. Otherwise, another person could help by holding the bag while the child puts his/her arms through the straps.
- ◆ Correct lifting techniques, which do not require bending of the back, need to be adopted.
- ◆ Care needs to be taken when lifting schoolbags on the back. Swinging the schoolbag onto the back could harm the spine.
- ◆ When fitted correctly, the backpack should contour to the child's back and not hang off the shoulders.
- ◆ The heaviest items, such as tablets, should be placed closest to the back of the student.
- ◆ The backpack's compartments need to be used to pack items securely so as to reduce the possibility of the load moving around.

