

## **As School Approaches Orthopaedic Trauma and Reconstructive Associates Weighs in on Backpack Safety**

**PEABODY, MA, Aug. 14, 2006** – With the start of the school year right around the corner, Orthopaedic Trauma and Reconstructive Associates, a leading orthopedic specialty practice on the North Shore, reminds parents to take special care when selecting a backpack for school-age children.

Worn by an estimated 40 million students across the country, backpacks are a handy way to carry books and gear. However, they can also lead to problems if they are too heavy for the child or improperly adjusted.

Research shows that overloaded or improperly worn backpacks may cause neck, shoulder and back pain, as well as adverse effects on posture and the developing spine, compromised breathing, and fatigue. According to statistics from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, more than 7,000 emergency room visits in 2001 were related to backpacks and book bags. Approximately half of those injuries occurred in children ages 5-14.

“Many parents are becoming more aware about the negative consequences of weighing down backpacks or wearing them improperly. The message we want to convey is to listen to your child if he or she complains about neck, shoulder or back pain,” says Todd O’Brien, M.D., a specialist with Orthopaedic Trauma and Reconstructive Associates.

O’Brien offers the following Backpack Basics, based upon the American Occupational Therapy Association’s guidelines:

- Make sure that your child’s loaded backpack does not exceed 15% of his or her body weight.
- Place the heaviest items closest to your child’s back
- Arrange books and materials so they won’t slide around.
- Don’t load the backpack with unnecessary items.
- Advise your child to hand carry books if backpack is too heavy.
- Consider using a bookbag on wheels if your child’s school allows it.
- Select a backpack with well-padded shoulder straps
- Be sure that your child wears both shoulder straps. The uneven load caused by slinging the pack over one shoulder makes him or her lean to one side and may cause pain or spinal problems.
- Adjust the backpack so that it fits snugly against your child’s back.
- Wear the waist belt if the backpack has one.
- Fit the pack so that its bottom rests in the curve of the lower back.

(more)

For more information about preventing backpack injuries or to discuss a specific concern about your child's back, neck or shoulder, contact Orthopaedic Trauma and Reconstructive Associates at 978-531-0800.

Located in Peabody, Massachusetts, Orthopaedic Trauma and Reconstructive Associates is the premier orthopaedic care center in northeast Massachusetts. The practice is committed to providing patients with the most current, sophisticated, technologically-advanced treatments for virtually any orthopaedic need. OTRA is comprised of a diverse team of fellowship-trained, highly experienced and Board-certified physicians, each of whom focuses on a well-defined subspecialty within orthopaedics.

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