



## Back Safety for “Back-to-Schoolers”

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This year, the National Safety Council has emphasized school safety. You can find excellent resources at their website:

[http://www.nsc.org/Safety\\_Home/SafetyObservances/Pages/BackToSchoolSafety.aspx](http://www.nsc.org/Safety_Home/SafetyObservances/Pages/BackToSchoolSafety.aspx)

Or just find National Safety Council with a search engine, and look under “news.” And, remember that safe work practices you learn on your job can help kids, too. We all want children to grow up healthy and productive. Teach them these ergonomic principles so they can avoid back injuries for life.



**Homework** – Give small children a low table where they can do their homework. If the child’s feet don’t touch the floor, provide a footrest. Position the computer monitor so the top of the screen is at or below the child’s eye level. Or, give them a booster chair to raise them to that level.

**Sports** – Make sure all equipment fits properly. Help young athletes learn proper form and technique, and stretching exercises appropriate to their age, experience level and specific sport.

**Sit up straight** – Encourage good posture when watching TV, playing video games or working on a computer. And, limit “screen time!” Young spines need frequent outdoor exercise, especially when children have been cooped up all day in class.

**Strengthen bones** – Ensure your child gets enough calcium every day. Milk, preferably skim, is essential for healthy bones.

**Soak up water like a sponge** – That means lots of H<sub>2</sub>O! Be sure your child avoids high-sugar, caffeinated and carbonated drinks. Encourage children to drink plenty of water. Soda has ingredients that harm growing bones. You can see what cola does to tooth enamel, so picture what it does to bones. High levels of phosphoric acid in sodas interfere with calcium absorption, a problem that could lead to osteoporosis down the road. And, soda drinking may be among the main causes of the current childhood obesity epidemic. Obesity in childhood can lead to adult obesity with bodily aches and pains lifelong!

**All-around health** – Children should eat a balanced diet low in fats and high in fiber and whole grains, stretch, be physically active every day, and maintain a healthy weight.

**Backpacks** – Put your child’s fully loaded backpack on the bathroom scale and you will be amazed. Middle and high schoolers tote a *ton* of textbooks. Make sure your child isn’t expected to carry more than 10 percent of their own body weight in their backpack. Ask them to remove items *before* school that they won’t need that day. Likewise, they should leave items in their school locker that they won’t need at home. Don’t let the load accumulate!

Encourage them to use both shoulder straps to balance the weight of their backpack. Slinging a heavy bag over just one shoulder unbalances the spine. And, inspect the shoulder straps to ensure they are wide enough and have enough padding to properly spread the weight onto the front of the shoulder. Narrow and thin straps can “bite” into the

shoulders and restrict circulation to the arms. Observe where the backpack rests against the child's back, shortening the straps if the bottom of the backpack is below the level of their belt.

**And, don't give YOURSELF a backache getting kids to school!**

**Follow the same *general lifting rules* you use at work whenever you lift children, such as preschoolers who are riding along in car seats. Likewise for lifting musical instruments and athletic gear:**

- Keep your head high, your chin tucked in and your back arched (maintain natural curves).
- Keep the child or the item close to your body and stand up straight, lifting with your legs, not your back.
- Don't bend at the waist to lift the child or object.
- Avoid twisting while lifting.
- Maintain a wide, balanced base of support by positioning your legs apart.

Most importantly, remember to give your school children a hug every morning. Even big kids need hugs to make it through a school day! And you'll have a better day at work, too!