

# Overworked

## How much is too much for the average high school student?

**W**alking through the hallways at Antioch Community High School can be frustrating, time-consuming, and sometimes risky. Students run, push, stop unexpectedly, make out, congregate in large groups and more, all in a very crowded setting. "It's like rush hour in some Third World country," commented Jim O'Connell, an ACHS senior.

Another constant presence in hallways is backpacks. Nearly everyone carries a bag of some kind, but that is not often considered one of the primary risks presented by hallway travel. However, Dr. Joan Marie Johnson, a chiropractor at Antioch Family Chiropractic, says carrying a backpack that is too heavy can pose a serious risk to students' backs.

She says students can end up with full spine injuries; that is, they can experience neck, mid and lower back pain.

Scoliosis is also a danger, according to Dr. Johnson, for boys through their senior year and girls through their junior year. Scoliosis is a common disease that involves serious curving of the spine. Dr. Johnson says that when a student adds a backpack to a back "that has a tendency toward curving already," it can even more serious problems.

Whether a backpack is too heavy or not depends on persons' body weight and the weight of their backpack. According to Dr. Johnson, the weight of persons' backpack should not exceed 10 percent of the persons body weight.

However, many students carry backpacks that exceed that limit. One such student is Kate St. Arnaud, a freshman. She weighs 123 pounds, while her backpack weighs 23 pounds. This means her backpack's weight is almost 19 percent of her total body weight. She says that her locker is in the hallway near the band room, which is nowhere near her classes; consequently, she says, "I really don't have time to get down there."

Sam Simpson, a sophomore, is another ACHS student whose backpack is too heavy. He weighs 210 pounds and his backpack weighs 24 pounds, which means his backpack's weight is over 11% of his body weight.

He gives another reason for his heavy load: "My classes are on opposite sides of the school. I don't have time to get to my locker," he says.

Many of Dr. Johnson's patients are students who, like St. Arnaud and Simpson, carry a backpack that is too heavy. She estimates that she currently sees about 200 people between the ages of 13 and 18. She says, "30 to 40 percent of these are backpack-related injuries."

To help prevent injury, students like Simpson and St. Arnaud have several options.

The option that Dr. Johnson advocates is pulling a backpack on wheels. She points out that while these "wheelie backpacks" may not be the coolest way to carry your books, they are the best solution to the back pain problem. This is because bags on wheels, Dr. Johnson says, do not "compress the spine," like backpacks do.

As long as students carry backpacks, they should use both shoulder straps. Using just one strap, "twists the torso, which causes pain in the neck and spine," says Dr. Johnson.

The problems that students have because of their backpacks are not easily solved according to Dr. Johnson. She can fix the problem, but unless changes are made, students must continue to carry their backpacks and injure themselves again. "It is more of a chronic injury," says Johnson.

It is a difficult problem to solve. The reality is, as Dr. Johnson says, there are "a lot of people and a lot of books they're carrying around."

There is no end to the use of textbooks in sight and crowded hallways are unavoidable for the time being. In order for treatment to work or for the problem to be prevented, Dr. Johnson says: "We have to take away what's causing the problem and we can't."

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According to the advice given by doctors, a student's backpack load should equal no more than 10% of his or her body weight. Students were weighed to see if the students at ACHS met these requirements. The weights were measured in the ACHS sports trainer's office, and were found to exceed the safe standards for backpack and book weight.

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**Kate St. Arnaud**  
**Freshman**



**Weight-123 lbs**  
**Bookbag weight-23 lbs**

**Sam Simpson**  
**Sophomore**



**Weight-210 lbs**  
**Bookbag weight-24 lbs**

**Rachel Luzwick**  
**Junior**



**Weight-97 lbs**  
**Bookbag weight-26 lbs**

**Scott Hagy**  
**Senior**



**Weight-165 lbs**  
**Bookbag weight-16.5 lbs**