

Heavy school bags are dangerous

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“Once, in Mapeera village, there lived a man – his name Lag, who looked like a young boy, because of his height. His back was bent, so he could not grow any taller, which made him remain more like a boy while his other friends were growing into big men.” Andrew, one of the boys in Mapeera village narrates.

For a long time, Andrew wondered why Lag had never grown into a tall straight man, but he could not find answers. One day Andrew gathered the strength to ask Lag what had really happened to him.

Bending over his stick, like a 100-year-old Mzee, he was only 25 years old, Lag explained to Andrew the cause of his underdeveloped growth.

“When I was still a little boy at home, I used to carry a lot of heavy things on my back. Heavy sacks of maize, beans, firewood. To make matters worse, when I was going to school, I would carry a very heavy bag with my books, my young brother’s books, my young sister’s books, their containers, our neighbour’s son’s books, and my friend’s books. In the end, I could not stand up straight like other people. I could not grow any taller,

and that is why my back is so bent like that. It is also painful,” Lag explained.

Have you also witnessed your fellow pupils carrying heavy bags? Or you yourself? Just like Lag, do you know that heavily-loaded backpack can be dangerous and harmful to your health and body?

Dr Angella Ssebulime, a paediatrician at Angelina Children’s clinic Entebbe explains that;

Health implications

Carrying a heavy bag to school can cause problems with a child’s body posture. They will either bend forwards to be able to support the weight of the bag, or bend sideways, especially for pupils who carry their bags on one shoulder. In the end, one’s posture

will be damaged even when they are not carrying a bag.

The other effect is on the back and shoulders. Since these are stressed in the process of supporting the weight, one can develop persistent pain in the back, because their spine has been stressed, or pain around the shoulders.

In addition, carrying a heavy bag requires a lot more energy from a child. So, if such a child has to walk to and from school, they will require extra energy to move, and to carry the heavy bag – which in

the end makes them exhausted. The doctor adds that sometimes, carrying the heavy bag makes children fear or hate going to school.

Recommended weight

So, now that you know the effects of carrying a heavy bag, the doctor advises that:

Children are recommended to carry bags that are only 10 per cent their body weight. For example, if a child is 20 kilogrammes, they should carry a bag that is only two kilogrammes.

Carrying a bag, whether heavy or not, on one shoulder is dangerous. It will make your body, and shoulders look tilted, so one should carry their bags on both shoulders.

The doctor also advises that bags with wide straps are better than those with narrow straps.

Derrick Mangeni, a teacher at Oxford Junior School, Nateete also advises that children should carry only those items that they are going to use at school for that day. This will help reduce the weight in the bag. He also adds that where possible, children should leave their books in their lockers or desks at school.

He also notes that some pupils help carry books for other children, adding more weight to them. He adds that every child should have their own bag. So, go live healthy, and carry a bag only 10 per cent your weight.



Our expert views

I’m Lydia, the editor of Rainbow, please write to me at rainbow@ug.nationmedia.com.



Carry less books to save your back

Early mornings, I see children carrying heavy bags that they can hardly carry on their backs without bending a little to support the weight.

The sight is painful but there is not much I can do as the children claim they have to use all those books by the end of the day.

This week we search for alternatives to this practice so that we can

save those backs from the health complications that may come with doing later.

Substitutes such as leaving some books in lockers at school, keeping the used up books at home and revising from text books at home could be some of the solutions.

Have a blessed Sunday.

Lydia Alnomuglisha

How can we avoid heavy backpacks?



Samuel Orishaba, P.7Y, City Parents' School

We can prevent carrying heavy bags by doing most of the revision at home so that we can leave the books at home. Schools should make lockers for children to their books.



Paean Arinda, P.7Y, City Parents' School

Leaving used up books at home and carrying only those that you need can help reduce your luggage. Also carry only the necessary textbooks.



Ainoth Mwesigwa, P.6Y, City Parents' School

Carrying only the required books for the day and leaving some books in lockers at home are some of the ways you can reduce the books to carry.