

My Bag is Killing Me!

Are you a student, athlete, business professional or someone who carries around a huge bag each day? Your friends and family may tease you about how you carry around “everything but the kitchen sink” in your bag, but what that bag may be doing to your back is no laughing matter.

Injuries are on the rise: Doctors are reporting a higher incidence of injuries to backs, arms, hands, shoulders and spines. Symptoms range from headaches and neck aches to conditions such as scoliosis. These problems have become so common that, in many cases, when a person suffers from these ailments, a doctor will immediately inspect the bags that the patient carries.

Take proper precautions: Doctors try to discourage people from carrying heavy loads, but these kinds of injuries will keep happening as long as we keep lugging around large, heavy or awkward bags. Fortunately, by taking the proper precautions, you can avoid injury and still carry a reasonable load.

Here are a few tips that you can employ to minimize damage:

- **Center the load:** Keep the bulk of the bag toward the center of the back. This means that if you are carrying a backpack, be sure to use both straps, not just one.
- **Avoid holding a cell phone:** Avoid talking on your cell phone when carrying a heavy bag. The tendency is to raise your shoulder on one side, causing you to walk lopsided. Prolonged time in this position may cause injury.
- **Switch sides:** If your bag only has one strap, frequently alternate the bag between shoulders and try to square your shoulders.
- **Keep bag within 10% of body weight:** The American Chiropractic Association recommends that a bag weigh no more than ten percent of a person's body weight. For instance, if you weigh 200 pounds, you shouldn't carry a bag that weighs more than 20 pounds.
- **Try carrying less stuff:** Take the time to evaluate what you need to get through the day.
- **Purchase a bag on wheels:** Many briefcases, backpacks and duffels come with optional wheels. This will provide a less harmful way to haul your load.

