

Backpacks



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Backpacks are used daily by people around the world. Many different types of backpacks exist, and they are offered in a wide variety of colors, sizes, prices, and utilities. Choosing a backpack can be a difficult decision. Comparing is always a smart idea. Students and adults of all ages use backpacks every day. You want to purchase a backpack that fits your body correctly to prevent back problems.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that before you purchase a backpack, look for the following five criteria.

- Choose a **lightweight backpack** that doesn't add a lot of weight to your load. For example, although leather backpacks look cool, they weigh more than traditional canvas backpacks.
- Choose a backpack with **two wide, padded shoulder straps**. Straps that are too narrow can dig into shoulders.
- Choose a backpack that has a **padded back**, which provides increased comfort and protects the wearer from being poked by sharp edges (such as pencils, rulers, notebooks, etc.) inside the backpack.
- Choose a backpack that has a **waist belt**, which helps distribute the weight more evenly across the body.
- Choose a backpack that has **multiple compartments**, which also helps distribute weight more evenly.

Types of Backpacks

Standard: The standard backpack is the most common backpack bought and used. It consists mainly of three zippered pouches and two adjustable straps. These days, many of the standard backpacks come with a laptop compartment for easy storage and accessibility to your laptop.

Backpack on Wheels: Backpacks on wheels are mainly used for younger children first starting school, people with back problems or other health issues, or for people with extremely heavy loads. This type of backpack is the one most recommended by doctors.

One Shoulder Strap: These backpacks consist of one strap that is worn around the shoulder. This type of backpack has only one pouch that either snaps or Velcro's shut. This backpack does

not provide a great deal of storage space and is mostly used by people in the city or around town. This backpack is also known as a “Messenger Bag.”

Outdoor: There are many different backpacks available for camping and outdoor uses such as backpacking. These range in sizes and styles - from weekenders to multiday to extended trip packs to climbing packs- and can carry from 35 to 70 plus liters. These packs often have a main compartment and a sleeping bag compartment. Some can even accommodate tools, cooking utensils and small tents.

Gender Specific Packs and Children’s Packs - Backpacks can also be purchased that are designed specifically for men, women and children.

About Straps

The main aspect that should be considered first when buying a backpack is the straps. The straps should always be adjustable to insure the best fit and weight distribution of the backpack. The straps should always be adjusted so that the user is comfortable carrying the load. When adjusting the straps, the straps should be shorter so that the load is carried higher on the back, lessening the possibility of back pain. Another aspect of the backpack is a hip belt that allows for an even distribution of weight within the backpack and along the back.

Load Types

There are usually two main closure choices: top loading and panel loading

Top-loading: packs with this design have one main compartment, covered by a rain flap that opens at the top with a drawstring (like a laundry bag); packs with a top-loading design are easily stuffed, but the wearer may have to dig down into the bag to retrieve desired items

Panel-loading: packs with this design have a zipper that opens a horseshoe-shaped front flap; more convenient panel-loaders have zippers that go most of the way to the bottom

Fabrics

Durable, coated fabrics repel sharp objects, resist tears, and repel rain water. Most backpacks are made of nylon and the heavier the weight of that nylon, the more durable the fabric.

Cordura nylon, ripstop nylon, and packcloth nylon are all very durable, strong, and abrasion resistant and have water repellant or waterproof coatings and/or treatments.

A well-made pack has seams stitched together firmly (stitching in a zig-zag pattern or in multiple rows is better than single-row stitching). High-abrasion areas, such as backpack bottoms as well as seams, should be reinforced with a strong material. Overall you want to check to make certain that the stitching is straight, there are no loose threads and that the fabric quality is able to withstand the weight that it will have to carry.

Frames

The more weight you carry, the more supportive your backpack should be.

Small daypack: is ideal for taking short hikes with a small amount of gear and for carrying books and supplies to and from school

Internal frame: should be used if the load weighs 10lbs or more or if the pack will be used for more than one day; since the frame is flexible and carries close to the body, it offers comfortable fit, low center of gravity, flexibility, and a relative freedom of movement to the user

The drawback to internal frames is that they do not carry unwieldy loads easily and can become unstable and uncomfortable if you need to carry gear on the outside of the pack

External frame: feature rigid, rectangular frames, typically made of aluminum or a more flexible plastic/nylon; the frame carries the pack away from your back, improving ventilation and making the pack a cooler choice

The drawback to external frames is that the weight carries higher than that of an internal frame, so the pack can become top-heavy unless it is properly loaded.

Features and Functions

- **Pockets:** compartments that organize the pack's contents and make it easier to find things; some packs have organizer panels designed to hold pens, pencils, calculators, other small items

- **Haul or Hang Loop:** Used to hang backpack or to pull the backpack. Should be well made and durable for strength. Usually has some extra padding on it for comfort in lifting a heavily loaded backpack.
- **Buckles:** Buckles should be made of a solid, sturdy material. Breaks in the contour make them less durable.
- **Heavy duty zippers:** strong, oversized, sturdy zippers that easily slide across the teeth of the zipper. Zippers that are inset away from the edge or the seam are best.
- **Back padding:** padding that keeps a pack's contents from poking the wearer in the back; some back padding is made of highly perforated foam or mesh material to help air flow and prevent the wearer from getting a "sweaty back"
- **Pack bottom:** a leather bottom is sometimes more durable than one of nylon or polyester, but leather isn't always waterproof; wet leather can transfer color; some bottoms are made of rubber, which is durable, but heavy
- **Compression straps:** straps that you can loosen to allow the wearer to carry more or tighten to keep a light load from shifting around in the pack
- **Zipper flaps:** zippers can let rain in unless they are covered with flaps; the wider the flap, the better
- **Shoulder straps:** most packs have padded shoulder straps that run from the top of the pack to an adjustable webbed strap at the bottom; well-designed packs run the webbed strap up the length of the main padded strap on the side away from the wearer, making it less likely that the straps will cut into your shoulders; straps shaped in a "C" or "S" also improve comfort; look for wide straps
- **Sternum strap:** adjusts the shoulder straps so they don't dig into you
- **Waist belt:** transfers the pack's weight to your hips, making it easier to carry a heavy load
- **Hydration pockets:** pockets that are designed to hold hydration bladders; look for pockets that will accept all sizes of hydration bladders

- **Hydration bladders:** these can be used in packs that have hydration packs and a hose; the bladder is filled with water or other liquid and the wearer can easily remain hydrated without ever having to locate a water bottle
- **Wheels:** wheels on the bottom of the pack allow you to drag the pack behind you; this feature is especially convenient for hauling around heavy textbooks and/or laptops
- **Personal Computer Storage:** a padded flap inside a main compartment that keeps a laptop from being tossed around within the bag
- **MP3 Compatibility:** MP3-compatible packs have a special compartment for an MP3 player and a hole for headphones
- **Reflective coating or strips:** Bags are often available with reflective strips and/or reflective coating that makes it safer if walking at night.
- **Cleaning:** Most backpacks have suggestions for cleaning on the care label. Follow manufacturer's instructions. Most can be cleaned by washing with mild soap and water.
- **Guarantee or Warranty:** most backpacks do have a warranty or a guarantee stating that the product is warranted to be free of defects in materials and workmanship for the life of the product. Be sure to check your bag's warranty specifications. Warranties generally apply only when the backpack is used for the purpose for which it was intended under normal conditions and may not apply to damages caused by typical wear and tear, unreasonable use or neglect.
- **Color or Clear Backpacks:** A wide variety of colors is available for backpacks. Colors range from red to navy, royal, black, brown, gray, green, yellow and even customized school colors. Some school systems require students to use clear or mesh backpacks. Check with your school system to see if they have this requirement prior to making your purchase.

Utility

Backpacks are used for a wide variety of activities. The majority of backpacks are used by school children or college students. However, people also use backpacks for hiking and traveling. For each of these three groups, durability is the key factor when considering which backpack to buy. Travelers and hikers need a backpack with a lot of storage room, but one that is also made

out of a heavy, durable material that will stand the wear and tear of the elements. Students need a backpack with less storage room, not quite as durable, but still made from a material that will not deteriorate. Many backpacks for all uses are made from canvas or waterproof material. Some backpacks, such as the Messenger Bags, can be made from leather or another high quality material.

Price

Standard backpacks usually range in price from \$25.00-\$125.00, with the price reflecting the quality of the backpack. Price is also determined by the type of backpack, with name brands or trendy companies having more expensive backpacks. The type of use the backpack was made for also determines price. Backpacks used for hiking or traveling range in price from \$50.00-\$175.00.

Some Considerations Before Buying

- Use of backpack
- Size of backpack
- Determine load of backpack
- Price range
- Straps
- Features Desired
- Warranty
- Construction

Backpacks have become a necessity. They are versatile, help with organization, and they are a part of almost every student's school needs. Adults frequently use backpacks as well. Look at your choices for a well-designed bag that best fits your needs and price ranges. Check all the features listed above and become a critical judge of quality, construction and design to become an informed consumer.

