

## *Prevent Injury from Backpacks, Purses, Laptops, and Wallets*

Courtesy of  
State Compensation Insurance Fund

People are used to hearing about ergonomics at work, but rarely think about the everyday items used to carry "stuff" that may contribute to physical discomfort and injury. The information below focuses on the ergonomics of what we use to carry our smart phones, computers, and other personal items.

Backpacks are used by people of all ages; unfortunately, they are often overloaded and packed incorrectly. This has contributed to an increase in reported back, shoulder, and neck pain.

- Wear both straps over both shoulders with the backpack over the mid-back muscles.
- Avoid the shoulder straps from being too loose or too tight.
- Keep the weight of the backpack within 10-15% of the user's bodyweight. Carry only what is needed and organize the contents by placing the heavier items closest to the back.

Purses have grown in size and weight and, as the saying goes, "the bigger the bag, the more stuff will fill it". Single-strap purses cause uneven loading of the back muscles and restrict blood flow at the shoulder.

- Keep purses as light as possible by carrying only what is essential.
- Avoid thin straps, long straps, and chain handles.
- Regularly switch shoulders when carrying.

Laptop bags are typically single-strap models, carried over one shoulder. The weight of the laptop and other bag contents can place considerable strain on the shoulder muscles, restrict blood flow, and pinch nerves.

- Consider using a bag with wheels or a two-strap backpack.
- Alternate carrying the bag by switching sides and holding it down close.
- Avoid using a sling-style messenger bag.

Wallets may be smaller, but they can contribute to extreme pain in the low back. Sitting on a wallet in the back pocket can cause damage to key nerves in the back. Always remove the wallet from the back pocket when sitting and/or driving. Consider a thinner, smaller style wallet and carry only what is necessary. ••

*Kristy Schultze, MS, CIE is a Certified Industrial Ergonomist with State Fund and is based in Northern California.*