

Packs could be pain in back, neck

PACK IT PROPERLY

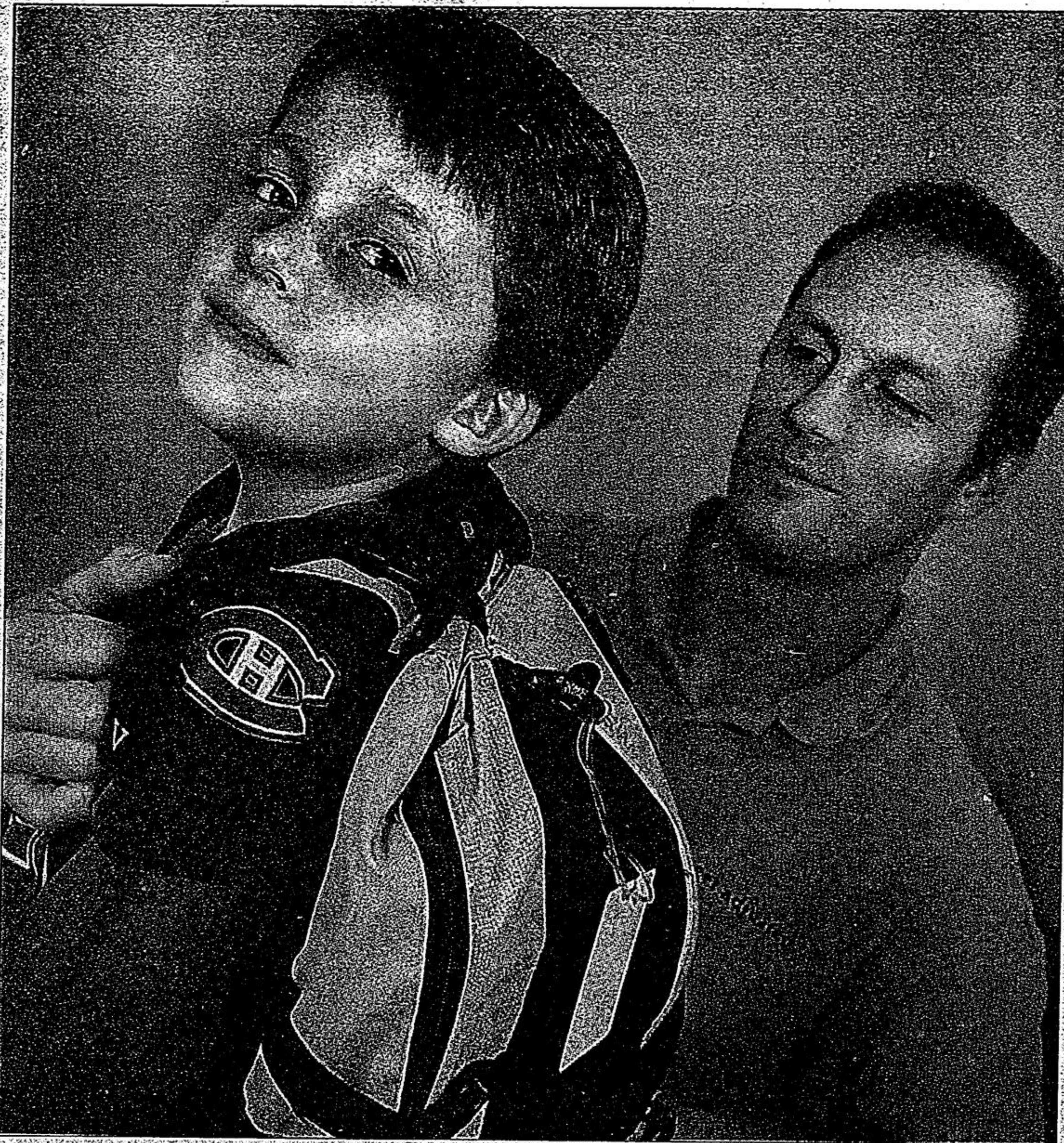
► **LAYERS:** Pack the heaviest items such as large textbooks and binders at the back of the pack, closest to your child's back;

► **LESS STRESS AT FRONT:** Lunch bags and pencil cases should in the front;

► **FILL IN BLANKS:** Items such as MP3 players, water bottles and other small items should be evenly distributed in the pockets;

► **REMEMBER BODY WEIGHT:** Children should carry no more than 10 per cent of their body weight in their pack and teenagers no more than 15 per cent;

► **TIGHTEN STRAPS:** Make sure the pack fits close to the waist.



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Dr. Craig Dingman demonstrates the proper way to fit a backpack on your child to ensure he does not experience back or neck pain. He is fitting the bag on to his son, Jackson's, shoulders.

CHOOSE RIGHT BACKPACK

► **FITTING:** Choose a size appropriate for your child;

► **LIMITS:** The pack should go no lower than the top of the hip bones and no higher than the top of the shoulders;

► **COMFORTABLE STRAPS:** The straps should be wide, S-shaped padded or adjustable;

► **PADDING:** There should be some padding between the back and the pack, especially with a depression in the middle to accommodate the spine;

► **SNUG FIT:** Tightened waist straps around the hips can lift a large portion of the weight off your child's back.

Fashion should not compromise your child's health, experts say

BY TERESA LATCHFORD
Staff Writer

If your children are complaining more frequently about headaches, the answer could very well be on their backs.

Everyday, students cram more than possible into their backpacks before heading off to school.

However, an improperly fitted pack or one packed the wrong way could wreak havoc on a child's spine, Aurora's Healing Hands chiropractor Dr. Shawna Hord said.

"Children can experience pain in the neck and shoulders, tingling in the arms or headaches," she said.

It is recommended students carry no more than 10 to 15 per cent of their own body weight in their back-

packs to minimize stress on the spine, she said.

A study, which surveyed 237 school-aged children, found the average student carried 22 per cent of his or her body weight and one-third of children carry 30 per cent.

Sixty-five per cent of children surveyed reported feeling tired and sore as a result and 46 per cent experienced pain.

"Unfortunately, we are a pain-focused society rather than a preventative one," Dr. Hord said.

The majority of people do not realize backpacks have such an impact on a child's health until the child is experiencing pain.

Strain on the spine is a given, but this strain can also effect the nervous

system.

"If there are problem areas at the base of the neck, not only does the neck and upper back get stiff and sore, but the function of the heart and lungs may also be affected in the long run because the brain uses the nerves in this area to communicate with those organs," fellow Healing Hands chiropractor Dr. Craig Dingman said.

Computer imaging is used at the clinic to determine problem areas of the muscular system and nerve function.

Dr. Hord and Dr. Dingman can then offer tips to remedy the problem.

"If a child is getting pain signals, they are losing nerve function that

operates the organs in the body," Dr. Hord said. "It takes years to develop, but over time, it will become a serious health risk."

There are traditional backpacks with two straps, one-shoulder computer laptop bags, some with wheels to be toted around like luggage and the messenger or postman bag with one strap crossing the chest with the bag sitting against the hip, said Deepa Pathmanathan, an employee at Bentley's at Markville Shopping Centre in Markham.

"The messenger bags are very popular," she said. "I guess it's because the kids really like the look of them."

Even though a backpack is stylish, children still need to be reminded

health should not take a backseat to fashion.

"Kids think they are way cooler with the side (messenger) backpacks," Richmond Hill Bayview North family chiropractor Dr. Hayden Lee said. "If it is absolutely necessary to have, children should at least pack them light and switch the side they are wearing it every day."

The best option is a double-shoulder pack, which is packed and fitted properly.

Prevention is simpler than treating pain later on, Dr. Hord said.

Proper item placement and distribution of weight within the pack can alleviate strain on the spine by preventing a child bending to compensate for the weight.

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