

TIPS & TRICKS: How to Choose a Backpack

Picking out a new backpack can be one of the easiest tasks to check off your back to school shopping list. With a little extra attention to detail you can be sure that the pack not only allows some personality to shine through, but that it also fits properly to minimize back strain and pain. Follow our study guide below to be sure your choice is at the top of the class:

STRAPS

Look for two wide, well-padded and adjustable shoulder straps. This will allow the weight of the pack to be distributed evenly across the shoulders and allow for readjustment during wear. A sternum or waist strap option is also helpful to keep the pack in place.

COMPARTMENTS

Multiple compartments are great because they not only allow for better organization, but they also help distribute the weight of the pack, so it's not focused on one area of the back. Pro tip – place the heaviest items closest to the back.

SIZE + WEIGHT

Backpacks come in different sizes and it's important to make sure the size you choose is proportional to your child's size. The pack shouldn't fall below the hip bones and it should fit snug within the natural curvature of the back. This will keep everything near the center of gravity for the most comfortable fit. The maximum weight when packed should not exceed 15-20% of your child's total body weight.



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Summer Falls Away

Glorious fall is one of the sneakier seasons. Maybe it's the lingering days of summer coupled with the bustle of a new school year, but it seems as if one day you're enjoying a warm summer afternoon and before you know it you're ankle-deep in fallen leaves. In the words of Oscar Wilde, "And all at once, summer collapsed into fall." The mornings become crisp, the days get shorter, and the leaves begin to show their colors. All letting us know that fall has arrived in all its glory.

But don't put your flip flops away and get out your sweaters just yet! The school bells may be ready to ring, but there are still a few weeks of the summer season left to enjoy. Read over our summer's end bucket list for some fun things to do while summer wraps itself up.

As you ready yourself for the coming changes of a new season and the laidback summer mentality is replaced with hectic school days, it's important to stay on the right track with your health. Check out our healthy habit section for information on a healthy sleep routine, refreshing your diet without setting yourself up for failure, and ideas to get you moving.

This edition of *SpineTimes* also covers how to give your kids lunch box a little extra love, a few stretches to help prevent back pain and much more. We sure hope you enjoy falling into this one with us!



A Word from Our President and Medical Director

Welcome and thank you for choosing Spine Institute of Central Florida (SICF) for your spine health and orthopaedic needs. We are so glad you're here!

At SICF, we're committed to and passionate about providing the most comprehensive care to our wonderful community.

~ Dr. Chukwuka Okafor



Provider Spotlight: Meet Kyle Merritt, PA-C

Meet Kyle Merritt, PA-C one of our physician assistants here at Spine Institute of Central Florida. Kyle graduated from Florida State University, Cum Laude, with a Bachelor of Science in Exercise Science. After graduation, he worked as a personal trainer for several years and assisted clients in living and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Kyle then went on to attend Physician Assistant School at Barry University and became a member of the Physician Assistant Student Association. He was also selected as Barry University's national representative to the Student Academy of the American Academy of Physician Assistants. Kyle graduated from Barry with honors and scored in the top

six percent on the Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam. He is a Certified Physician Assistant and holds an active ACLS and PALS.

Kyle has been Dr. Okafor's physician assistant since he graduated. Through his time working at SICF, Kyle has proven that he is an exceptionally skilled medical professional with a strong understanding of orthopedic and spinal care. He has an excellent bedside manner and remembers every patient by name, treating each one as he would a close friend.

When Kyle is not helping patients, he enjoys spending time with his wife, Andrea, and their children. He is also an avid golfer and CrossFit athlete.

Meet the Team

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Fall Into Healthy Habits

How to stay on the right track while transitioning your routine from summer to fall.

The dog days of summer are upon us and, although it may be a while before the weather feels like it here in Central Florida, the fall season is right around the corner. Although each season brings change, fall seems to be filled with an extra-large dose. Leaving the relaxed vibe of summertime behind and replacing it with the multiple responsibilities that a new school year, work and home life bring can make it challenging to keep moods and routines from going haywire. But it is possible to start on the right foot and incorporate healthy habits into your fall routine that will keep your family happy and well. We've put together a few tips to get you started.

Get the proper amount of sleep and practice a healthy sleep routine. Getting the right amount of quality sleep is important for both kids and adults. After a summer of staying up late and sleeping in for the kiddos, and more wiggle room for parents in their morning and evening schedules (we're looking at you long drop off lines and homework), back to school time can bring about a rude awakening. Studies have shown that sleep affects everything from the immune system to learning and memory, so it's crucial to get the proper amount of it. Adults need between 7 and 9 hours of sleep each day with children and teens requiring more. One of the best ways to get enough sleep is to practice a healthy sleep routine. What does a healthy sleep routine look like you ask? Go to bed and wake up at the same time every

day. Try to limit the difference in these times to no more than one hour on the weekends, as being consistent helps maintain the body's internal clock. Avoid bright lights and blue screens in the hour before bedtime by dimming your lights and switching your devices off. If you must continue to use your device in the hour before bedtime at least dim the brightness to minimize the impact. Refrain from consuming heavy meals and alcohol close to bedtime and say no to caffeine after early afternoon since its effects can last up to six hours. If you always find yourself missing your bedtime try setting an alarm. Avoiding hitting snooze in the mornings as you aren't getting quality REM sleep between alarms. It's better to set one alarm for a later time than an early alarm with plans to hit snooze several times. When you do wake up, open your blinds or step outside for a few minutes to expose yourself to as much bright natural light as possible. This will also help maintain your body's internal clock which makes it easier to go to sleep and wake up as planned.

Put some healthy back in your diet. If your summer was filled with lots of junk food at the lake, late-night pizza with the kids and a few more trips to your local ice cream parlor than you'd care to admit now is the perfect time for a diet overhaul. Consider it a tune-up to keep you running in top shape. You don't have to make drastic plans for change that might just set you up for failure during this busy time of year. Instead think more long-term success with small, attainable

goals. A great place to start is by incorporating seasonal fruits and veggies into your diet. Apples, pears, kale, Brussels sprouts, butternut squash, pumpkin, sweet potato, and Swiss chard are all in prime season. On top of being delicious and full of nutrients, they also hold up well in fall favorite soups, stews and casseroles. Try incorporating a different seasonal produce item into a few meals each week. Choose one meal a day and aim for filling half your plate with vegetables. Cut back on sugar and processed foods. Drink more water.

Get outside and move your body. In addition to getting enough sleep and good nutrition, exercise is another essential part of a healthy lifestyle. If you've spent a long summer exercising inside to avoid the extreme heat, take advantage of fall's cooler temps and incorporate more outdoor activity into your workout plan. Take a long walk or go for a hike on the weekends with friends. Get your blood pumping and burn some calories by raking leaves in your yard. Visit a local apple orchard, pumpkin patch or corn maze and try to keep up with the kiddos for a fun dose of cardio. In addition to burning calories while doing outdoor activities, you'll also get the added benefit of soaking up some sunshine to help increase your production of vitamin D.

We hope these tips help you enjoy all the good things fall brings while also staying on a healthy and happy track!

One Pan Fall Chicken Dinner

Loaded with seasonal veggies, this flavorful chicken sheet pan meal is sure to become a family favorite. It's easy to make, easy to clean up and delicious – a perfect combination for those busy weeknights.

Ingredients:

- 5 Bone-in, skin on chicken thighs
- 4 Tbsp olive oil, divided
- 1 1/2 Tbsp red wine vinegar
- 3 Cloves garlic, minced (1 Tbsp)
- 1 Tbsp each minced fresh thyme, sage and rosemary
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 Large sweet potato, chopped into 3/4-inch cubes
- 1 lb. Brussels sprouts, sliced into halves
- 2 Medium fuji apples, cored and sliced into half moons about 3/4-inch thick
- 2 Shallot bulbs, peeled and sliced about 1/4-inch thick
- 4 Slices hickory smoked bacon, chopped into 1-inch pieces
- 2 Tbsp chopped parsley, for garnish (optional)

Instructions:

Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Pour 2 Tbsp olive oil, red wine vinegar, garlic and herbs into a gallon size resealable bag. Add chicken, season with salt and pepper then seal bag and massage mixture over chicken while working to evenly distribute herbs. Set aside and let rest while chopping veggies. Place sweet potato, Brussels sprouts, apples and shallot on an 18 by 13-inch rimmed baking sheet. Drizzle with remaining 2 Tbsp olive oil then toss to evenly coat, season with salt and pepper to taste. Spread into an even layer. Set chicken thighs over veggie & apple layer. Separate any pieces of bacon that may be stuck together then sprinkle bacon over veggie apple mixture. Roast in preheated oven until chicken and veggies are golden brown, about 30 - 35 minutes (chicken should register 165 in center). Broil during last few minutes for a more golden-brown crispy skin on chicken if desired. Garnish with parsley and serve.

*Recipe from Cooking Classy
(September 2018)
www.cookingclassy.com*

LUNCH BOX LOVE

Does your inspiration for packing a lunch end between two pieces of bread? A classic PB&J or turkey sandwich is the foundation of many a lunch box, but let's face it...eating a sandwich every single day can be rather boring. Although kids generally want something they recognize in their lunch box they do actually like variety. Keep lunches recognizable yet interesting with some of our favorite lunch box love ideas below:

- **Fresh Veggies & Hummus Box** – include assorted veggies with pita triangles and hummus. Add a side of cheese and a cookie for dessert.
- **Fruit & Cheese Box** – include assorted fruits and cheese. Use small cookie cutters to cut the cheese into fun shapes. Serve with crackers or pretzels, a lunch meat rollup and yogurt.
- **Pizza Pack** – include mini flatbreads with various toppings such as pizza sauce, shredded cheese, and mini pepperoni. Serve with sweet peppers and mixed fruit.
- **Taco Box** – include tortillas, shredded chicken or ground beef, shredded cheese and any vegetables your kid likes with tacos. Add a side of sour cream or plain Greek yogurt and salsa for dipping and chocolate covered raisins for a sweet.
- **Italian Box** – include bowtie pasta and mini meatballs. Serve with marinara sauce for dipping, caprese salad skewers (grape or cherry tomato, basil, fresh mozzarella) and a mini brownie.
- **Breakfast for Lunch** – include leftover pancakes or waffles, sausage links, and a hard boiled egg. Serve with fruit.

The lunch ideas above can easily be modified each week to keep things fresh but still stick to a similar theme and require the same basic ingredients. For example, the taco box could alternate between standard tacos, quesadillas, burritos, and nachos. Try using fish sticks or shrimp as the meat for a lunch box take on fish tacos and serve with a side of slaw. Another tip is don't worry about serving most things piping hot. Kids don't share our adult bias that foods normally consumed hot must be hot to be enjoyed. Just be sure everything is kept at a safe temp until lunch time and we promise they'll dig in happily!



A Cure for the Common Lunch Blahs

Want to avoid sending your kids off with the same old boring lunches this year and keep your sanity in the process? Read on for some inspiration!

The start of a new school year is the perfect time to start fresh with your kid's lunch menu. Staying inspired day after day for an entire school year can be challenging, but a little creativity mixed with some planning ahead can help you keep lunches tasty and varied for your kiddos and, dare we say, even easy for you!

First things first, you can't easily pack lunches without the right tools. The proper lunch packing supplies will make all the difference and you can take it to the next level by keeping them well organized and stored near where you will be putting the lunches together. Choose durable, dishwasher safe containers that will survive both the daily wear and tear of use and daily trips with your children. Leakproof containers with multiple sections are ideal and silicone baking cups can be used to divide up larger sections. Insulated containers for sending hot or cold food and drinks are helpful, as well as snack-sized containers for any extras you might want to send. Use lunch box sized bamboo sticks for skewers without the pointy ends of toothpicks. Don't forget small cups to hold condiments and a good-sized, insulated lunch bag to carry everything in.

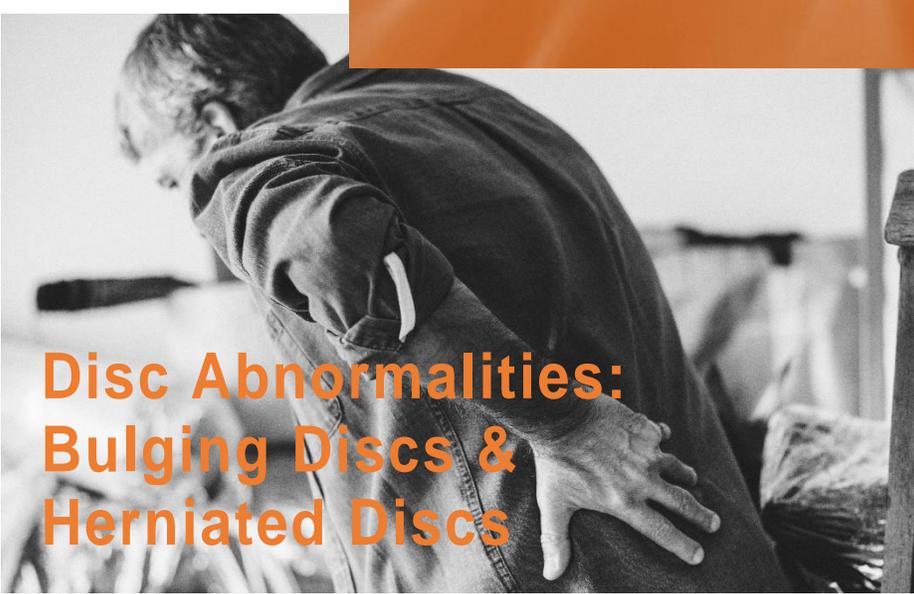
Next, following a simple formula for what to include in each lunch allows you to cover all the bases without stressing. Include one

item from each of the following categories for a healthy, complete lunch: protein, veggie, fruit, carb, and drink. Planning for each week and packing lunches the night before will keep things running smoothly Monday through Friday, while doing the shopping and prep work over the weekend ensures you'll have everything you need for the week ready to go. Create a loose framework menu for each day of the week so you can take stock of what you already have on hand and know what you need to put on your shopping list. You don't have to be super specific, just a general idea. For example, Monday – Pizza Pack, Tuesday - Wraps, Wednesday - Leftovers, Thursday - Veggies, Friday - Taco Box. Doing this will help keep you on track during those extra busy days when you don't have much time or energy left to spend on packing lunch but also leave room for flexibility if you're feeling creative. After you return home from shopping and before Monday morning, take the time to wash, chop and divide fruits and veggies into single servings, shred and/or cut blocks of cheese to package for different meals, and fill small containers with hummus, peanut butter, yogurt and the condiments your menu calls for. Make batches of rice, quinoa, and pasta to divide into serving size portions for easy additions to lunches. Use your instant pot to make shredded

chicken that can be used in everything from salads to tacos, and then divide into portions to freeze for later use. Another great tip is to make extra of any meal you cook that freezes well and divide into serving sizes for an easy grab and pack lunch for a leftover day on your menu.

Have an extra picky eater or tired of complaints about what you packed in their lunch box? Let them pack their own. You can still follow the plan and prep tips we've covered, but the kids put their own lunch together by selecting items from each category of the lunch formula. To make it quick and painless, create packing stations for each category and stock them with serving size portions of dry goods in the pantry and perishables in the fridge. Your child just has to grab their lunch box, add choices from each station and voila, lunch is packed! All you have left to do is make sure the lunch box makes it into the fridge after it's packed, add ice packs the next morning if necessary and dare them to complain about their lunch after school.

And there you have it, a plan to cure the common lunch blahs. Still need a little encouragement? Be sure to check out the column on the left for some of our favorite lunch box ideas.



Disc Abnormalities: Bulging Discs & Herniated Discs

You've probably heard both the terms bulging disc and herniated disc, but do you know the difference between them?

To understand the difference in these disc abnormalities it is helpful to understand the basics of spine anatomy. The spine is made up of different parts that include vertebra (bones), discs, nerves and soft tissues (ligaments, tendons, muscles). The bones connect to make a canal that protects the spinal cord. The discs are rubbery, cushioning pads that fill the space between the bones. They act as shock absorbers and allow the spine to bend and flex. Discs are composed of a tough outer layer, called the annulus, and an inner gel-like fluid content called the nucleus. The liquid inside helps

to distribute pressure evenly across the disc.

Children and young adults have discs with 100% or normal fluid content. As we age the fluid content naturally begins to decrease and this is what allows the disc to bulge. A bulging disc is a natural occurrence during the aging process.

A herniated disc occurs when some or all of the fluid content of the disc nucleus is pushed through a weakened or torn part of the annulus. This disc abnormality can be caused by normal, age-related wear and tear on the spine, but it may also be due to a traumatic event (such as a fall or car accident). A disc herniation can further be divided into protrusions and extrusions. These descriptions

refer to the disc shape alone and do not determine severity or pain level. In disc herniation with protrusion, only a small portion of the fluid content in the disc is beyond the normal confines. A disc herniation with extrusion happens when the fluid content of the disc has made its way out of the normal confines of the disc and into the area where the spinal nerves are located. In this case, the herniated fluid content can put pressure on the very sensitive spinal nerves and result in pain.

If you are experiencing back or neck pain that is severe, ongoing or accompanied by numbness or tingling in your arms or legs, it could be time to make an appointment with your healthcare provider for evaluation.

Posture Points

Posture is how you hold your body and holding your body correctly helps keep the back and spine healthy. Good posture basically means that you are keeping each part of the body in line with neighboring parts to maintain the three natural curves of the spine. When practicing proper posture while standing, you should be able to draw an imaginary line from your earlobe, through your shoulder, hip, knee and down to the middle of your ankle. It's important to maintain good posture whether you are

moving, standing or sitting still and while sleeping.

Poor posture and slouching over the years often lead to pain in the back, neck and shoulders. It can decrease flexibility, joint movement and balance. Poor posture can even make it hard to digest your food properly and breathe easily.

Simply being aware of your posture can lead to improvement. Evaluate how different situations affect your posture and take action to correct it when necessary.

This Edition's Q&A: Three Easy Stretches to Prevent Back Pain

Q: Are there any stretches I can do to prevent back pain?

A: Many everyday activities can lead to back pain. Regular stretching can help protect your back by increasing flexibility. Talk with your doctor before starting a new program of back exercise, especially if you have a history of spinal problems or back injury. Once you have the all clear, try doing the three stretches below regularly to protect your back.

Knee to Chest Stretch:

Lie on your back on the floor with your legs extended. Bend and lift your right leg and bring the knee toward your chest. Grasp your knee, thigh or shin with your hands and pull your leg towards your chest, as far as it will comfortably go. Hold for 20 seconds and slowly extend leg to return to starting position. Repeat 3 times for each leg.

On All Fours — Cat Stretch:

Begin on your hands and knees on the floor. Your hands should be under your shoulders and your knees should be under your hips. Exhale and gently arch your back, inhale and tighten your core muscles and round your back like a cat stretching. Hold in each position for 5-10 seconds and move slowly between each. Repeat 10 times.

Standing Back Arch:

Stand up straight with your feet shoulder-width apart. Put the palms of your hands on your lower back. Take a few slow, deep breaths to relax. Bend your upper body backwards, keeping your knees straight. Support your back with your hands. Hold for 5 seconds. Return slowly to your starting position. Repeat 5 times.



Summer's End Bucket List

Although summer doesn't officially end until late September, the start of school and anticipation of the fall can lead to the last weeks of summer slipping through our hands. Interested in making sure that doesn't happen to you? Check out our summer bucket list below and see how many items you can check off before it's all over!

- Cookout with friends – enjoy good food and good company
- Go swimming – we hope it won't be your first dip of the season, but visit your nearest pool/lake/beach ASAP
- Watch the sunset – bonus points for an epic location to take it in
- Go camping – build a fire and make s'mores
- Take a walk on the beach – collect all the pretty shells you find along the way
- Enjoy a sno-cone – go wild and get the large
- Have a water balloon fight – last one dry is a rotten egg
- Go for a picnic – make it a day trip destination, roll your windows down and listen to your favorite music while you enjoy the ride
- Spend an afternoon relaxing in a hammock – read a book, nap, repeat

Sports Spotlight: Soccer – Preventing Common Injuries

Soccer is considered the most popular sport in the world and continues to rise in popularity in the United States. Playing soccer helps develop balance, agility and coordination while building endurance. As with any sport, there is a risk of injury. Being aware of the risks, taking preventative measures and ensuring proper treatment can keep players healthy and on the field for the long haul.

Proper preparation off the field is important. Be sure to have a pre-season physical exam and maintain fitness during the off-season. Both will ensure the player is in good physical condition and ready for play when the season starts. Warm up before practice and games so muscles are ready for activity. Cool down and stretch afterwards to further reduce the risk of injury. Stretching helps reduce muscle soreness and will keep muscles long and flexible. Adequate hydration before and during play is vital for peak performance. It is generally recommended that athletes drink 24 oz of a caffeine-free drink 2 hours before exercise, and 8 oz of water every 20 minutes while exercising.

Players should wear well-fitting shin guards and molded cleats. Soccer goals should be properly secured and well padded. Mobile goals can fall on players and padding will decrease the chance of head injuries when players collide with the posts. The playing surface should be kept in good condition, free from holes, debris and bare spots.

Some of the most common soccer injuries are sprains and strains to the lower extremities, overuse injuries, and collision injuries. Coaches and staff should be prepared for injuries that do occur by being knowledgeable about first aid for minor injuries (cuts, bruises, minor strains) and having a plan to reach medical personnel for more significant injuries (concussions, dislocations, sprains, fractures). They should also be able to recognize early signs of pain and discomfort that could indicate overuse and teach the players to be aware of those signs as well. Allow any injuries to fully heal before returning to play.

Did You Know?

Your spinal cord stops growing at the age of five. The spinal cord grows a lot during the first four to five years of life, from about 16 to 20 inches, and after that, it's done. Your backbone and body continue to grow into adulthood around the spinal cord, but it stays the same size as it was when you turned five.

Upcoming Events

- August – National Spinal Muscular Atrophy Awareness Month
- September – National Spinal Cord Injury Awareness Month
- September 2nd – Labor Day (Office Closed)
- September 23rd – First Day of Fall
- October 16th – World Spine Day
- October 31st - Halloween

Contact Us

We'd love to hear from you! If you have any topics you'd like to see covered in our newsletter or questions addressed in our Ask the Doctor features, please drop us a note in our suggestion box. You may also email us at info@SpineInstituteFL.com or find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/SpineInstituteFL.

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