

Ergonomic Strategies for Using a Briefcase



Effects of carrying a heavy briefcase

- Heavy briefcases worn over one shoulder cause uneven weight distribution across the back muscles and may restrict blood flow at the shoulder.
- Heavy briefcases place extra pressure on the nerves of the neck and shoulders and can result in pain in the neck, shoulders and lower back. Pain may be described as pins and needles, tingling, stiffness, numbness, or tightness.
- Avoid carrying a briefcase with your thumbs—this will cause excess pressure on the joints in your hands/fingers.

Tips for selecting the right briefcase

- Consider a wheeled briefcase.
- Choose a briefcase that is proportionate to your body size and no larger than what is needed.
- Avoid selecting briefcases made of heavy material such as leather. This only adds extra weight! Instead, select a briefcase made of lighter materials such as microfiber and nylon.
- Select briefcases with built-in compartments. This will help to distribute the weight more evenly.
- Straps:
 - Select a briefcase with padded straps to distribute equal weight across your shoulder.
 - Avoid thin and long straps; straps should be wide and adjustable. Ensure that any pressure caused by the straps does not cause discomfort.

Tips for packing your briefcase correctly

- Make time every evening or morning to review the contents of your briefcase. Remove unnecessary duplicates such as extra pens and notebooks. Only keep the items needed for that day and leave other items at home or in your car.
- Consider purchasing an extra set of accessories (e.g., power cord and battery) to leave at your office so you do not have to regularly carry heavy items back and forth between your home and office.
- Clip your cell phone to your waistband.
- Always pack the heaviest items at the bottom of your bag and make use of built-in compartments to distribute the weight.

Tips for carrying your briefcase correctly

- Briefcases with short handles:
 - Switch positions frequently to avoid fatigue from muscle overuse.
- Briefcases with shoulder straps:
 - Place the strap diagonally across the opposite shoulder to help distribute weight evenly across the back.
 - Square your shoulders and avoid lifting your shoulders to keep the shoulder strap from slipping.
 - Alternate shoulders by switching the briefcase from side to side.
 - While carrying your briefcase, consider resting it on the floor, counter or railing when waiting or standing in line.

These tips were provided by Brittney Nichols, OTS (brittneynichols@gmail.com), Priscilla Nova, OTS (priscillanova@gmail.com) and Karen Jacobs, EdD, OTR/L, CPE, FAOTA (kjacobs@bu.edu) of Boston University.

Ergonomic Strategies for Using a Purse



Effects of wearing a heavy purse

- Heavy purses worn over one shoulder cause uneven weight distribution across the back muscles and may restrict blood flow at the shoulder.
- Heavy purses and shoulder straps without padding place extra pressure on the nerves of the neck and shoulders and can result in pain in the neck, shoulders and lower back. Pain may be described as pins and needles, tingling, stiffness, numbness, or tightness.
- Avoid carrying a purse with your thumbs—this might cause excess pressure on the joints in your hands or fingers.

Tips for selecting the right purse

- Buy different sizes of purses for different occasions. The size of your purse should reflect specific activities:
 - Short errands—small, compact purse
 - Long errands—small backpack or knapsack worn around the waist
- Avoid heavily loading tote-style bags, which are worn over the shoulder.
- Select purses with built-in compartments. This will help to distribute the weight more evenly.
- Choose a handbag that is proportionate to your body size and no larger than what is needed.
- Avoid selecting purses made of heavy material such as leather, which adds extra weight! Instead, select handbags made of lighter materials such as microfiber and fabric.
- Straps: Avoid thin and long straps; straps should be wide and adjustable. Ensure that pressure caused by the straps does not cause discomfort.

Tips for packing your purse correctly

- Consider the contents of your purse—can you leave some items at home or in your car?
- Eliminate unnecessary duplicate contents, such as extra pens and lipsticks.
- Wallet: Regularly empty your wallet of coins. Reduce the number of cards you carry; many places can access your account without the proof of your card.
- Toiletries: Look for travel-size options for items you may need, such as lotions, make-up, and hand sanitizers.
- Cell phone: Clip your cell phone to your waist.
- Keys: Leave keys you do not use on a regular basis at home.
- Accessories: Limit the number of accessories in your purse.
- Medication: Request sample-sized medications.

Tips for carrying your purse correctly

- Purses with short handles:
 - Switch positions frequently to avoid fatigue from muscle overuse.
- Purses with shoulder straps
 - Place the strap diagonally across the opposite shoulder to help distribute weight evenly across the back.
 - Square your shoulders and avoid lifting your shoulders to keep the straps from slipping.
 - Alternate shoulders by switching the bag from side to side.
 - While wearing your purse, consider resting it on a counter if you are standing at a checkout counter.

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Ergonomic Strategies for Using a Suitcase



Effects of a heavy suitcase

- Lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling, carrying, holding, and dragging heavy loads involve static and dynamic efforts, which cause strain on muscles and joints, and wear and tear on the back.

Tips for selecting the right suitcase

- Size: Buy different size suitcases for different occasions. The size should reflect the length of your trip.
- Type: If traveling by air, select wheeled luggage. If traveling by car, select duffels or garment bags.
- Material: Avoid selecting suitcases made of heavy material such as leather. This only adds extra weight! Instead, select a suitcase made of lighter, durable material such as vinyl and canvas.
- Handles: Select a suitcase with extending handles with a swivel feature, with padded handles to protect the joints in your hands and fingers from excess pressure, and with handles at both ends, which will make it easier to pull the bag out of a tightly-packed overhead compartment.
- Wheels: Select a suitcase with large wheels. The suitcase should have 4 wheels, allowing for smooth rolling over various surfaces and better maneuverability through small spaces and aisles or 2 wheels with a 360° turning radius.

Tips for packing a suitcase correctly

- General: Make a list of what you will need on your trip to ensure that you only pack essential items. Instead of packing one heavy suitcase, consider distributing weight, and take two smaller suitcases to avoid back strain when lifting your suitcase into the overhead bin. If you are going on a long trip, consider shipping items ahead of time, and taking one small light suitcase on your flight.
- Clothes: Decide what you will wear in advance, and pack only those items. Consider packing less and making use of laundry facilities during your stay. - Check the weather before your trip -to avoid packing “just-in-case” clothes. Wear your heaviest clothing items on the plane.
- Footwear: Pack no more than 3 pairs of footwear. Pack footwear that can be worn with multiple outfits.
- Toiletries: Most hotels provide complimentary toiletries. Downsize toiletries and look for travel-size versions of your favorite products or transfer into small containers.

Tips for carrying a suitcase correctly

- Opt for carrying two light suitcases, one in each hand rather than carrying one heavy suitcase in one hand or on your shoulder.
- Avoid carrying heavy suitcases for prolonged periods of time. Carry heavy items close to your body. Switch positions frequently to avoid fatigue from muscle overuse.
- When using a 2-wheel (360° turning radius) suitcase with adjustable handles, push the suitcase in front of you or to your right or left side instead of pulling it behind you.

Tips for loading a suitcase in an airplane correctly

- Do not rush—move slowly! Lift your luggage in stages. When loading your luggage into an overhead bin, first lift it to the top of the seat, rest, and then lift it into the overhead bin.

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