

How to Fit a Backpack

A backpack needs to fit correctly before it can be comfortable. The key measurement to fitting a backpack is to know your torso length. Your hip measurement (not waist) can be helpful to know but your height is not important.

Here is how to find your torso length:

You will need a cloth sewing tape measure and a friend to measure you. Locate the bony bump on your spine at the base of your neck. This is your 7th cervical (or C7) vertebra. Tilt your head forward to locate it more easily. This is the top of your torso length. Next place your hands on top of your hip bones (also known as your iliac crest), with fingers pointing forward, thumbs in back. The imaginary line drawn between your thumbs is the bottom of your torso length.

Measure the distance along the curve of the spine between the C7 and the imaginary line between your thumbs. Be sure you stand up straight when being measured. You now have your torso length and can use that measurement to find the correct backpack.

Most backpacks come in two different size ranges. There is usually one that can be adjusted between small and medium sizes and another for medium to large sizes. For example, a manufacturer might have a small to medium version of a backpack that fits 13-17 inch torsos then a medium to large version of the same backpack that fits a 17-21 inch torso. If your torso measurement is on the line between the two ranges, choose the medium to large pack or go to the store and try the packs on.

When selecting any backpack, be sure to check the fit of the hip belt. A properly worn backpack will have most of the total weight supported by the hips. NOT the shoulders. It is one of the most important features of the backpack. If the hip belt can not be snugly fitted on the hips, the backpack will not be comfortable to wear once fully loaded. Younger scouts can have very narrow hips making it a challenge to find a backpack that will be comfortable for them to carry. If the hip belt cannot be cinched down around the hips (not the waist) tight enough, move on to a different backpack.

While less important than torso length, hip size can be useful to know if ordering a backpack online. Here is how to properly measure it:

Take your tape measure and wrap it around the top of your hips. The correct measurement is along the imaginary line that radiates out from your belly button to your sides and the high points of your hip bones. This is slightly different than your waist, so your hip belt measurement may differ from your pants waist size. A properly positioned hip belt will straddle your hips about an inch above and below that imaginary line, wrapping around the two pointy pelvic bones on the front of your body.