How to Properly Adjust Your Backpack to Fit You

Now that you have selected your pack (If not, see “How to Select a backpack that is best for you”), it is time to learn how to properly adjust your new pack to ensure a comfortable and custom fit. To make your life easier, do this at home BEFORE you head out. Trail-head adjustments are a recipe for disaster! If possible, you should use a large mirror or get a friend to help while going through these next steps.

**Step 1- Load the Pack:**
Start by loading the pack with about 20-25 lbs. of weight to simulate a loaded pack. You can use camping gear for the weight or even bags of dried rice or beans will do the trick. Next, make sure all the pack’s compression straps are tightened and the shoulder harness, sternum strap, load lifter straps and hipbelt are loosened.

*Follow the next steps IN SEQUENCE to achieve the best fit every time you put on your backpack.*

**Step 2- Hipbelt:**
Put the pack on your back so that the hipbelt is resting over your hip bones. In “how to measure your torso length for backpacks,” we learned that this is your iliac crest. Close the hipbelt buckle and tighten the straps so the center of the hipbelt pad is directly over the hipbones. The padded portion should wrap well around the front of your hips with at least a 1” clearance between the edge of the hipbelt pad and the center of the buckle. As a general indication that this has been done correctly, the hipbelt buckle should be right over your bellybutton.

**Step 3- Shoulder Harness:**
Tighten the shoulder harness by pulling the ends of the shoulder strap down and behind you. Your arms should be pointing downwards, towards your pant’s back pockets as you pull. This brings the pack closer to your body. The shoulder straps should completely wrap around your shoulders, with no gap between your shoulder and the shoulder harness. Look in a mirror or have your friend check to make sure the shoulder strap anchor points are 1” to 2” below the top of your shoulders. Another indication of a proper fit is that the shoulder strap should end roughly several inches below the armpits.

*Note: The shoulders are not the weight bearing bones of the body, the hips are! Ensure that the weight is distributed with this in mind and that the hipbelt is carrying the majority of the load – not the shoulder harness.*

**Step 4- Top Load Lifters:**
The top load lifters are the straps located on top of the shoulder harness that go up and back at an angle to connect with the back panel. *These straps are among the most commonly MISUSED straps on a backpack.* To adjust these, gently snug the load-lifter straps until the slack in the webbing it tight. The objective here is to snug these straps enough to prevent the pack from tilting too far away from you. You should NOT tighten them down so much that it draws the backpack closer to you. If you tighten them too tight, it will focus a great deal of pressure on the front of your shoulder and be very unpleasant. It will also cause a gap to form between your shoulders and the shoulder straps; and, this is not a good thing.

To ensure you have done this correctly, look in a mirror while standing sideways and check for the following points:
1) The load lifter strap should angle back toward the back panel at a 45-55 degree angle.
2) There should be no gaps between the shoulder harness and back part of your shoulder.
3) You should not feel any unusual or focused pressure on the front of your shoulder or your collarbone area.

**Step 5- Sternum Strap:**
Adjusting the sternum strap should be quick and easy with these two steps:
1) Buckle the sternum strap and adjust the height on both sides so that they are even across the chest, roughly 2” below the collarbone.
2) Lightly snug the sternum strap down. This pulls the shoulder straps comfortably away from your armpit and centers them over your shoulders. Do not pull so tight that it hinders your breathing.

**Step 6- Final Adjustments:**
You are almost done! Next, snug the hipbelt stabilizer straps which are located towards the back of the hipbelt, close to the frame sheet. This brings the load in tighter to your back so it is more stable and easier to carry.

*Congratulations, you have successfully fit your Roamm Pack to your frame! Each of these adjustments will be fine tuned further as you hike. You can shift the load from your shoulders to your hips and vice versa. Also, adding and removing layers will require minor adjustments. Adjusting the load as you hike is a great way to stay comfortable.*

*Loading the pack is just as important for comfort. Please see “How to properly load your backpack”.*