



# It's in *the bag*

The secret culprit behind common body aches? Here's a clue: You likely own several. "A lot of women don't associate neck, shoulder and upper back pain with carrying a heavy purse," says Dr. Annette Bourdon, a chiropractor based in Montreal. Even worse, she notes, these temporary aches can lead to chronic pain, muscle spasms and tension headaches. But don't toss your beloved leather boho just yet; instead, follow these four easy steps to lighten your load.

BY KAREN ROBOCK

## THREE STRETCHES TO EASE BIG-BAG STRAIN

### SHOULDER ROTATION

Roll your shoulders forward in a large, slow circle for a count of five. Do four reps in one direction, then repeat in the opposite direction.

### HEAD TILT

Inhale and slowly move your head over to the shoulder opposite to the one you use to carry your bag. Hold for three seconds as you exhale slowly, then release. Do four reps, then repeat on the opposite side.

### CAT STRETCH

Take a deep breath and stretch your arms out, wrists extended, fingers interlaced and palms facing outward. Round your upper back and tuck your chin into your chest as you push your hands and shoulders forward. Exhale for a count of four, then release. Do four reps.

**1. DON'T HAUL EVERYTHING AROUND ALL DAY.** Unload the non-essentials as soon as you get to the office, advises Gisele Green, a Winnipeg-based physiotherapist. Put your lunch in the fridge, stow extra shoes under your desk and stash your makeup bag in a drawer.

**2. MAKE USE OF ALL THE STRAPS AND HANDLES.** If you always wear your bag slung over your right shoulder, try extending the strap (if you can) and wearing it across your chest, carrying it by the handles or tucking it under your arm instead. Repeated strain on the same muscles is what causes the most problems, says Bourdon.

**3. CLEAN OUT YOUR BAG ONCE A WEEK.** Check the contents of your purse regularly – chances are, you're carrying a lot of stuff that you don't need every day. Dump out the contents and get rid of all those old receipts and extra pens. "The cumulative weight of these little items really adds up," says Green. Once it's empty, prioritize what you put back in, focusing on the essentials. She also suggests purging the contents of your wallet to shed some additional weight, setting aside any credit and rewards cards that you don't use on a daily basis.

**4. MOVE THE NON-ESSENTIALS TO ANOTHER BAG.** A backpack or briefcase on wheels is ideal for carrying extras like your gym clothes and laptop, but even a cloth shopping bag works (just be sure to carry it on the opposite shoulder or in the opposite hand from your purse so that the weight is evenly distributed). ☺