

The Question of Back Belts

“Several years ago I conducted a review of the effects of belt wearing (McGill, 1993) and summarized my findings as follows:

- Those who have never had a previous back injury appear to have no additional protective benefit from wearing a belt.
- It would appear that those who were injured while wearing a belt risk a more severe injury.
- Belts appear to give people the perception they can lift more and may in fact enable them to lift more.
- Belts appear to increase intra-abdominal pressure and blood pressure.
- Belts appear to change the lifting styles of some people to either decrease the loads on the spine or increase the loads on the spine.

In summary, given the assets and liabilities of belt wearing, I do not recommend them for healthy individuals either in routine work or exercise participation. However, the temporary prescription of belts may help some individual workers return to work.

Manufacturer’s of abdominal belts and lumbar supports continue to sell them to industry in the absence of a regulatory requirement to conduct controlled clinical trials similar to those required of drugs and other devices. Many claims have been made as to how abdominal belts could reduce injury.”

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1. McGill, S.M. (2007) *Low Back Disorders-Evidence-Based Prevention and Rehabilitation*. Second Edition. Human Kinetics: 158-164.
2. McGill, S. M. (1993) Abdominal belts in industry: A position paper on their assets, liabilities and use. *American Industrial Hygiene Association Journal*, 54 (12): 752-754.