

FITNESS FOCUS

On the use of Weight Belts

Many people have formed opinions on wearing weight belts while strength training. Most people who wear weight belts have done so because they have observed others wearing them and they assume it would be good for them to do so. Some think that it will help prevent them from injury and soreness, while also being able to lift more weight. The individuals who promote wearing weight belts may go a little further in their reasons. Here are a few claims that are made:

- Belts remind people to lift properly.
- Belts support the trunk when shear forces are loaded in flexion.
- Belts reduce compressive loading on the lumbar spine that occurs with increased intra-abdominal pressure.
- Belts act as a splint, reducing the range of motion and thereby decreasing the risk of injury.
- Belts enhance proprioception via pressure to increase the perception of stability.
- Belts reduce muscular fatigue.



Although these seem to be very good reasons to wear a weight belt, the research actually contradicts these claims and assumptions. Here are some summaries that have been compiled from a good range of case studies:

- Belts appear to change the lifting styles of some people and in-turn, assist people on maintaining a proper neutral spine.
- Belts caused people to change their movement which can cause increased loads on the spine.
- Belts sometimes increased intra-abdominal pressure, in which actually increased net compressive loads on the spine, rather than decrease them.
- Injuries suffered while wearing belts are usually more severe.
- Belts tend to increase blood pressure.

As we can see, the research shows different outcomes from what many have assumed. Unfortunately, the assumptions that are created from the “average Joe” in the gym aren’t consistent with objectives to good health. Lifting more is often the goal, apart from attempting the weight that will ensure proper form. If you’ve been comfortable with a weight belt and feel that it has benefited you, then stick to it. However, take into consideration what the research has found and how it can lead to good health. It will be best to practice good form and maintain proper spinal alignment when weight training, while also implementing the core muscles. For further thoughts, talk with our Nimkee Fitness Personal Trainers.

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