



SUPPORT BELTS

No safety product has, in recent memory, created as much controversy as have Support Belts. Here are the pros and cons to wearing a support belt.

Support belt manufacturers say that the belts supply support to the lower lumbar area of the spine and also to the abdominal area as workers lift. In addition, just the act of wearing the belt is a daily reminder to lift safely. Manufacturers however, never state that support belts will protect your back from injury 100% of the time.

On the negative side we have the "Girdle Effect". The girdle effect occurs simply because as back muscles are supported by external means over extended periods of time, they need no longer function themselves to support the torso and gradually suffer weakening due to loss of use. The girdle effect occurs primarily in workers who do not use the belts as instructed. Support belts are designed to be conveniently tightened just before executing a lift and to be loosened immediately following the lifting session. In practice, however, workers routinely wear support belts cinched up tight for the majority of the workday.

Another common problem cited with support belts is the "Superman Effect". Studies show that many workers who wear their support belts cinched tight most of the day will feel as though they are immune to a back injury. Falsely presuming that the belt will protect their backs in all situations, these workers tend to use poor body mechanics while lifting. They unfortunately learn the hard way that back injury can result, even with the aid of a support belt, if poor lifting techniques are used.

On a more positive note, however, experts do tend to agree that a combination of ergonomic workplace evaluation, worker training on **POWERLIFT**[®] Technique, coupled with the proper use of support belts, is a very positive move towards decreased worker injury. Although ergonomic work place design, worker education and training in lifting are felt to be the most powerful tools towards reducing worker injury, support belts can, if used correctly, be a complementary adjunct to your safety program.