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Be not afraid of growing slowly,

Be afraid only of standing still.

Chinese proverb

A personal return on experience from over 30 years strength sports experience.

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6. 6. The Belt - Sense and Nonsense

Disclaimer: When you want to start an exercise program – please consult your physician first !

The dark mysteries of Fitness equipment. Just like the sheer existence of cigarettes does not means they are usefull or good - there is a mystery around why weightlifting belts with a narrow front exist.

I just received a question from a trainee on this subject - "what belt to buy".

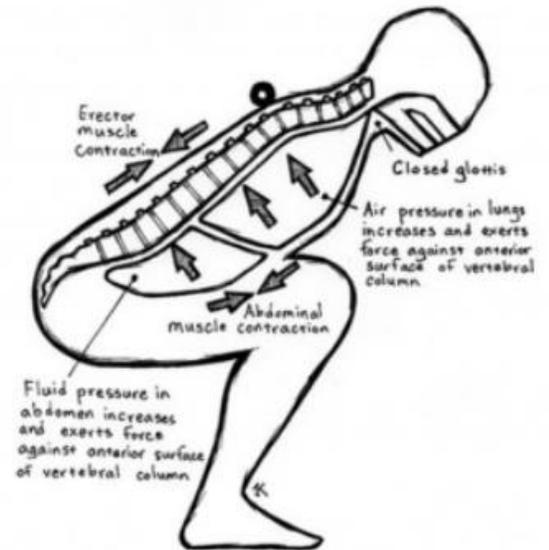
The need for and mechanical principle of support from a belt is based on:



1.Skeleton wise your upper and lower body are only connected by your spine.

2.Your abs, lowerback and serratus (aka "core") need to be strong and balanced to keep your body supported. Think of it as a pop can – unopened with fluid pressurized on the inside it is very resisting and strong – once opened you can crumble it easily with 1 hand.

3. Under (lifting - squat, deadlift) tension the contraction of your abs will build up pressure in your intestins (mainly a "fluid ball"). This "ball" will sit between your pelvis and lungs (compressed, held breath when it gets tough...) - and as such provide support in front of your spine - preventing your spine to bend forward - and somewhat your pelvis from tilting forward. Of course your lower back and erectors are frantically working on that aspect as well.



A wide fronted belt now allows your abs to press against a resistance, and build up more pressure - and thus more support. This also means a wide belt does not have to be worn "ultra tight" (another urban myth in itself..) - it is not a mechanical effect...but a pressurizing effect we are after. In fact wearing it too tight will prevent your abs from being able to contract and thus exert pressure.

A small front belt totally missing this mechanism - and is as such pretty well useless - come it to additional support provision. Having a piece of wide leather at the back only is not doing very much at all.



Try both out and you will notice the incredible difference. Many people never even see a wide belt - as they are considered "powerlifting gear"...(which they are..but anyone seriously doing S&C will squat and deadlift with substantial weights...).

However - lifting the mystery - I think the small front belts exist because:

1. Usually people do not lift heavy enough (if they use free weights at all) to need the support from a real wide belt. So actually they do not notice the missing extra support it would provide.

2. They act as a nice garment to make your waist look small and thus backflare/ the "Vee" - and chest - a lot more impressive when parading around the gym. On top they can be worn all workout long at any exercise (leg press, benchpress, dumbbell kickbacks, heck even leg raises..) without hampering your mobility or breathing. So this cosmetic effect - is what I secretly suspect is the MAIN reason I see people wearing them....



A last piece of advice - only use a belt in loads over 80% of 1RM - give your core a chance to "work" and functionally develop - without the belt support mechanism. Next time when you put a load of Ikea boxes in your car, odds are that you will not have your belt with you.

Your functionally well trained core (without a belt) will protect your back and thank you for that...

ATC - "We Are Growing"

