

## **Gizmos**

### **Back supports or back belts.**

Back supports are sometimes worn by people with back pain, or to prevent injuries by people who do a lot of heavy or repetitive lifting at work. The use of back supports is somewhat controversial because there is no evidence that they are effective for treating back pain or in preventing back injuries. In fact, there is some evidence that suggests that using a back support is just as effective as no treatment at all. For this reason, and because there is often a substantial cost in purchasing a back support, their routine use is not recommended.

Some people swear by using a back support, they feel better. If that is the case, and someone is able to move around and be more productive with a back support on, there is no harm from using the support. In some individual cases, using a back support might be beneficial if it allowed you to return to work or do your daily activities sooner than you would be able to do without it.

There may be some instances when your doctor may recommend a back support for a specific purpose. Some specially made or customized braces provide more rigid support or control of motion than a soft support and are used after a traumatic injury or surgery. They are usually worn for a limited period of time while injured tissues are healing.

### **Shoe inserts**

Shoe inserts do not prevent back pain, but there is also a lack of evidence to say whether they can help relieve back pain. Lack of evidence means that of the studies that looked at using shoe inserts for back pain, none were properly designed or used a large enough number of subjects to make any firm conclusions. Some of the smaller studies that showed some effectiveness of shoe inserts were done on subjects who had specific problems with one leg, or had one leg significantly longer than the other. For most people, rather than spend money on shoe inserts, we would suggest investing in a pair of good, comfortable, supportive shoes so you can do more walking. Walking has been shown to help back pain.

### **Special Mattresses or back pillows**

Studies that have shown one particular type of mattress to be better than another, or that a specific type of mattress is better for a particular 'type' of person are not conclusive because they were not well designed. These studies had small numbers of subjects, or were not controlled to eliminate things that could have influenced the results. None of the studies were strong enough to justify spending a significant amount of money on a special mattress. A good night sleep is important, however, not only for your back, but your total well being. It is important to have a comfortable and supportive mattress, but finding a comfortable mattress may be a matter of trial and error. What is comfortable for one person may not be comfortable for another. So try before you buy.