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Chronic Use of Non-Medical Abdominal Compressors: Medical and Psychological Implications

Sawsan Edriss

Wayne State University School of Medicine, er0539@wayne.edu

Bushra Azom

Wayne State University School of Medicine

Manar Edriss

Wayne State University School of Medicine

Mustafa Edriss

Wayne State University School of Medicine, mustafa.edriss@wayne.edu

Ann-Cathrin Guertler

Wayne State University School of Medicine, acguertler@wayne.edu

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Sawsan Edriss, Bushra Azom, Manar Edriss, Mustafa Edriss, Ann-Cathrin Guertler, Eva Waineo MD, and Diane L. Levine MD

The popularity of waist cinchers, shapewear, abdominal binders, corsets, and waist trainers has increased in the population. Although corsets have been part of western fashion since the 18th century, abdominal compressors remain in style even today. In 2018, sales for shapewear worldwide were estimated at 2.26 billion USD. 1 Despite its popularity, shapewear safety and medical effects have not been widely studied.

In 1968, “Pantygirdle Syndrome” was described, attributing vulvitis, urethritis, and urinary tract infections to materials used from the “pantygirdle”. 2 The article describes that the girdle caused gastrointestinal symptoms with diaphragmatic and stomach displacement causing gastro-esophageal reflux disease that resolved with girdle loosening. 3 Physicians related abdominal compression garments to the development of dyspnea, syncope, GERD, esophagitis, colon infarction, leg thrombophlebitis, varicose ulcers, and deep vein thrombosis. 6

Objective

Despite commentary, evaluation, and recognition of medical side effects with chronic use of shapewear and abdominal compression garments, there is a paucity of literature that describes who wears shapewear, for which reasons, and associated adverse effects from shapewear use. The purpose of this study is to describe the population of women that choose to wear shapewear and aims to:

1. Better understand modern-day usage of modern forms of shapewear
2. Assess why women wear shapewear and their shapewear usage habits
3. Assess for medical associations and potential complications with acute and or chronic abdominal compression
4. Evaluate if certain psychological conditions increase the use of shapewear or other abdominal compressors

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