



Kim Kardashian's corset selfie raises questions: How dangerous is the practice of corseting?

By Hollie McKay



This week, selfie-queen Kim Kardashian posted yet another photo of herself in the mirror, this time squishing her mid-section into an itty-bitty corset and announcing to her 20 million Instagram followers that she is “really obsessed with waist training.”

She isn't alone – Jessica Alba, Khloe Kardashian and Brooke Burke are all reportedly fans of the practice. But are these Hollywood types actually promoting a pretty dangerous practice to their legions of admirers? In the past year, perhaps in connection with increased celebrity chatter, Google searches related to waist cinching have doubled and a concept called the “Corset Diet” has been floating around cyber space.

“This is so ridiculous, these people should know better. You are blocking oxygen, reducing flow to your lungs, heart and other organs which in turn slows metabolism as your cells become deprived of oxygen,” New York Times bestselling celebrity fitness and health expert JJ Virgin told FOX411. “Organ failure can also occur. In a word: don't.”

Some women and men will seek to “train” their waists to incredibly small sizes by progressively donning smaller and smaller steel-made corset for up to 12 hours a day – some even sleep in them. The Guinness World Record holder is a woman by the name of Cathie Jung, who got her waist down to a mere 15 inches. Over time, the repressive steel garment can alter the position of organs in the body and can even lead to muscle atrophy as the muscles used to hold the body upright are weakened.

The tight feeling around the waist also compresses the abdomen and may reduce one's appetite or ability to consume larger amounts of food. Corsets made of latex increase sweating, leading a loss of water weight. But Raffi Hovsepian, MD, FACS and Triple Board Certified Beverly Hills Plastic Surgeon, cautions that the results are only "temporary," and that problems can arise in conjunction with the excessive perspiration.

"The theory is that if you do it long enough, it will change your shape and contour your ribs but for the most part, it pushes your insides...away from your waist," Dr. Gabriel Chiu, of the Beverly Hills Plastic Surgery, added. "But when used appropriately, it is safe."

Julia Reed Nichols, a Los Angeles-based singer and burlesque performer who routinely "slips" in and out of a corset, said that everyone wants to warn of the dangers associated with the garment – from broken ribs to fainting on stage – but she has yet to encounter anyone who has taken their waist training to the point of injury.

"We wear them to help obtain that perfect feminine hourglass figure," she said. "But they are not comfortable, and certainly no ideal for the busy life that most of us live."

Love it or loathe it, the practice of corseting is hardly new. The first corset was created in the 1500s and became a historical staple of the Victorian and Edwardian eras.

"The corset allowed the lady to keep a youthful figure longer, a factor important to most ladies to this day," explained Don Bracken, of History Publishing Company. "The appearance of a youthful figure is something no lady wants to lose..."

Physicians later claimed the garment was a prime cause of miscarriages and cancer. The rise of the feminist movement in the 20th century saw them plummet further into the background, but thanks to the recent Hollywood limelight, corsets are having a moment once again.