

## **A Brief Look at the Different Options Available in Body Armour**

While body armour is often considered a necessity only for those in violent professions, the truth is that anyone who may face injury or attack should consider body armour. As body armour becomes more and more accessible and wearable it is increasingly important that people are aware of how it can benefit them, and whether they should consider their own protection. One of the main barriers to body armour for many is simply not understanding how it works.

One of the other barriers, however, is the price and weight. Bullet proof vests have traditionally been seen as bulky and restrictive items that come with a high price tag. However, this is far from the truth; while in the past this may have been the case, modern materials have allowed for protection to become incredibly lightweight, flexible, and affordable.

Of course, body armour is not just restricted to bullet proof vests, or even just one type of material. All of this combines to make a very confusing industry, and many simply do not understand what is available to them. This is very important when considering items that are designed to save lives, and this is why the following article looks at exactly what levels and types of body armour are available, and what they can do for you.

### **Ballistic Protection**

The most important thing to be aware of when it comes to your armour is exactly what protection it offers. Bullet proof vests are the most common types of body armour, and are usually the most useful. These vests are designed to protect against ammunition of varying sizes and strengths, according to its level. However, almost all of them will use the same materials.

'Soft' bullet proof vests utilise materials like Kevlar, which offer incredible strength-to-weight ratios to help protect against weapons. These materials are capable of absorbing and dispersing great amounts of energy, while also trapping bullets. The number of layers of Kevlar or equivalent materials determines how strong the vest is. This is in turn determined by testing standards set by the US National Institute of Justice, the world leader in ballistics testing. These '[NIJ Levels](#)' outline exactly what ammunition a vest can protect against.

'Hard' bullet proof vests are also tested and graded according to NIJ standards, and are explained by NIJ Levels. They will also use materials like Kevlar, but with an additional rigid plate, usually made of Ceramics or Polyethylene. These rigid plates are far stronger, and will be capable of stopping high-powered ammunition. However, they will naturally be heavier and thicker.

### **Stab and Spike Protection**

Ballistic protection is not the only type of protection available, however, and may not be the most appropriate for many. While the materials used in a [Kevlar vest](#) are very strong, they cannot stop

edged or spiked weapons. This means that protection against weapons like knives, needles, or broken bottles will require a stab or spike proof vest.

These vests use additional materials like chainmail and/or plastic laminate to provide protection. The chainmail can provide a tough surface that protects the Kevlar; otherwise the fabric would simply be cut by an edged weapon. Spike proof vests require a solid surface, however, to stop the spiked weapon from passing between the links in chainmail and the gaps between the Kevlar fibres. Most stab and spike proof vests will still use Kevlar, however, in order to help absorb and disperse the energy of an attack. This means that it may also offer ballistic protection, but it is important to be sure before you buy a vest.

## **The Style of Vest**

All of the materials described above are increasingly lightweight, thin, and flexible, meaning protection can be achieved in very discreet vests. This means that almost all protection- including 'hard protection'- can be found in both covert and overt styles.

Covert vests are designed to be worn underneath clothing, while still providing the same levels of protection. This means that a vest can be completely discreet, and unnoticeable. This is of particular benefit to those working in sensitive situations who do not wish to advertise their protection. Moreover, some covert vests are designed with materials that can help keep the wearer cool.

Overt vests, conversely, are worn over the top of clothing, and even as part of a uniform. These vests have the benefit of providing additional warmth and protection against the elements, with many overt vest being offered with durable and waterproof materials. Furthermore, many overt vests can be augmented or equipped with high-visibility covers or strips, logos, or insignia, making it a useful addition to a uniform. They can often also be equipped with pouches and pockets for additional equipment.

Tactical vests are designed to be worn over clothing, like overt vests, but are usually made of much more durable materials and come with additional protection for the neck, throat, upper arm, or groin for example. These vests are usually reserved for only the most dangerous of situations, as their extra weight and bulk will make them inappropriate for any other environment. However, for those who will be facing extreme threats, they provide unparalleled protection.

## **Things to Remember**

The most important thing to remember when considering body armour is that there are simply so many options available, and while this can be daunting, it ensures that you can find a vest that is suited to your environment and circumstances. It is vital therefore that you are aware of the different options available to you, and ensure that you choose the correct level of vest for the threats you will face. Just as important, however, is making sure your vest fits correctly. An ill-fitting vest will, at best, be uncomfortable and annoying to wear. At worst, it will have gaps in protection that may prove to be life-threatening.