

Bra Fitting Fun

Some people consider the bra to be an ugly contraption designed for restraint and pain. Most of us see it as a necessary evil. Fitting yourself into a bra would seem to be a rudimentary skill. The first one you get is practically cupless and you move up from there. It can't be that hard. Right?

It is estimated that anywhere from 60 to 85% of women are wearing ill fitting bras. Usually this means that they are too tight, but they may also be poorly made, or just not right for your figure. This can make you feel as you might after a long day in four inch spikes. Many ills are attributed to the bra, which is sometimes vilified as capable of causing breast diseases. We'll have a look at why this may and may not be true.

If you're going to wear a bra, it is vital that you get the right size. That would seem pretty obvious, but doing it is not really straight forward. If you've been wearing a 36C and decide to measure yourself, you'll find the measurement doesn't add up to 36. The math is more complicated than that and was invented early in the 20th century as the modern bra was developing.

The first measurement to take is right under the breast. Measure around your rib cage snugly and write this number down. (This is **not** your band size.) Next, add some numbers. If the measurement is under 33 inches, add five inches. Yes, that's right. This system was invented to *sound* good. Add five inches. If the number is over 33 inches, add just three inches. If the resulting number is uneven, add another inch. (Pay attention, this is an exact science.) The resulting number is your band size, and must be even, which is why we're all 36, 38, etc.

Now for the cups. Warners introduced four cup sizes in 1935 to replace previous descriptions like junior, medium and large. The original sizes were A, B, C, and D. One interesting thing about this is the social commentary on people sizes, rather than just breast sizes. Now sizes apparently go to J.

To calculate the cup size, measure loosely to the largest part of the breast, making sure the tape measure is straight around the back to where the largest point might be. From this number subtract the first measurement you took (not the band size with the additions). Take this number to a chart that begins this way: if the resulting number is 0" your cup size is AA. If the number is 1" your cup size is A, if 2" B, and so on. Now you have your bra size. Don't worry how it comes out, or whether you're a perfect 36C. Those "perfect" ones rarely exist anymore, and only your bra fitter would ask you anyway. (Right, guys?)

But that's only the size, which may not be the most important component. How the bra sits on your body is key. The centre gore, the part between the cups at the front, needs to sit flat against the chest wall. The band should not ride up your back. Underwires, bra bands and shoulder straps should not dig into your body or hurt (this is an important health consideration, as there are lymphatic vessels in these areas that must be free to drain.) If the underwire or band are too loose they'll ride up onto the breast as you move around. There should be two boobs, not four, that is, no bulging over the cups. Assuming your bra fits perfectly, it may only do so three weeks out of the month. Some women's bodies vary so much with the ebb and flow of menses that they should keep two wardrobes of bras, with different cup sizes. I would suggest that these larger sizes are also more expensive ones, prettier, fancier and more appealing to support us on days when our bodies may feel less comfortable and attractive. No one needs to see your undergarments, but knowing they look great certainly gives you a boost. Bras also stretch over time, so if you need a good excuse to buy a new one, there it is.

Good circulation is perhaps the single most important aspect of breast health. This is more than blood circulation and for the breast, what is really vital is lymphatic drainage. The lymph vessels are fairly close to the surface and are easily squashed by pressure, either from outside or from inside, when the breasts are full or engorged. Good lymphatic flow is the most important reason to have the right fit. Women who can, often choose to go without. Camisoles are suggested instead. These may be

somewhat elasticized and help minimally with shaping and jiggle control. When you get home, though, jiggle is what it's all about. Get the bra off and shake the breasts out.

Breast massage from a therapist and self massage are important in assisting the breast to keep circulation free to flow. At home, gently massage the breasts, scooping with the opposite hand towards the armpit, and gently grab and release the armpit and pectoralis muscle. Bend forward and cup the breast in the opposite hand. Push it gently but firmly against the chest wall and release, repeating several times. The breast drains from the nipple backward to the chest wall. These exercises help to stimulate circulation in the breast so that it can "breathe" and drain more efficiently. Never sleep in a bra or any tight fitting clothes.

Now for the fun part. Does an everyday bra need to be special? They're not really interesting anyway, surely. "Not so," says Linda at Vicanie's in Kitchener. "There's so much more than boring and beige." Having a bra fitted professionally, as Linda can do in her shop, also doesn't mean that you emerge looking like a Viking woman with a pointy front and seams running every which way. There are gorgeous things on the market to choose from in every size and shape.

Foam Lined are all the rage at the moment, but you may choose a T-shirt Bra, seamless and invisible under even the thinnest fabrics. Convertibles let you move the straps for halter, criss-cross, strapless or one shoulder tops. There are Minimizers for a little less and Padded, Push-ups or Cookies for a little more. Cookies are oval shaped, removable demi pads, which are also useful if one breast is smaller. Contours and Full Cups hold it all in, but for a more revealing look there are Demis, for barely there coverage, and Balconettes for dramatic cleavage but little to no coverage.. Racerbacks give a no-show fit under tank tops, and at least one sports bra is a must for physical activity. Remember to add some lacy camisoles for after work and evenings in.

Above all, the prettier they are the better. They're not for anyone else. A good bra is just for the woman who wears it.