THE SECRETS TO FINDING A GREAT-FITTING BRA

You count on them for support, but odds are your bras are not your bosom buddies. If you’re like most women, you think the pinching and slipping are normal and unavoidable. And you’d probably never dream that a bra could make your clothes look amazing. But the truth is, a good bra is the foundation for everything else you put on. Pick the right one, and you won’t even know it’s there—except for the fact that your sweaters and dresses will sit better, and your T-shirts will look neater. So what’s the secret to finding the perfect bra? Fit is key, obviously, and it turns out that 47 percent of us have trouble finding our size in the bra we want. But style, color, and shape count too. Read on to find out how to get a perfect fit, pick the right shape for your body, and adjust the straps and bands so they’re supportive and comfy. We’ll also tell you how to keep your bras in good shape. Plus, check out the latest in bra technology and whether or not an expensive bra is really worth the splurge.

22% of women in our exclusive survey say they always or often regret bra purchases.
Getting the perfect fit

If you can’t get an expert bra fitting, here’s how to do it yourself and find a bra that works.

BEFORE YOU HIT THE STORE, TAKE YOUR MEASUREMENTS:

1. **To find your band size (32, 34, 36, etc.)…**
   - Wrap a measuring tape around your back, under your arms, and around your rib cage (just below your boobs).
   - If the number is even, add 4 inches; if it’s odd, add 5.

2. **To find your cup size (A, B, C, etc.)…**
   - Loosely measure around the fullest part of your bust.
   - Then subtract your band measurement from that number.
   - If the number is even, add 4 inches; if it’s odd, add 5.

WHEN TRYING ON BRAS, LOOK AT THE FOLLOWING:

**Shapes**

- Don’t assume the straps are positioned where they should be. Make them as loose as possible when you first try on a bra and adjust them until they feel right. Straps should sit flat, without sinking into your skin. But don’t rely on the straps to lift your breasts. If you do, you’ll make the straps too tight and they’ll wind up digging into your shoulders. If they’re too loose, they’ll constantly slip down.

- Your breasts should fill the cups enough so they don’t look baggy, but not so much that there’s spillage. This cup-umenth-over effect can also happen if you don’t choose the right style, so try on a fuller cut in the same size before you jump to the next cup size. **TIP** Not all cups are the same: A 34C, for example, has a smaller cup than a 38C. Also, cup sizes vary by manufacturer, especially European ones. So even if you think you have the right size, try on a few sizes from different manufacturers.

- Make sure the front of the band is parallel to the back. It should be fitted but loose enough to slide your finger underneath. If it’s riding up in back, the band is probably too big. Be sure that the band is comfortable on the middle setting because over time your band can stretch up to 2 inches.

**Problem:** spillage

This staffer says she never seemed to have enough coverage in her bra. “I feel like I’m pouring out,” she complained.

**Solution:** A size 40D, a size larger than she was wearing, with a different cut. This Le Mystérie Dream Traha bra ($68) has extra coverage with molded cups that keep her in place but are soft, so the look is natural.

**TIP:** When trying on a molded bra, push in the nipple area; it bounces back if the bra fits.

**Problem:** support

She thought regular bras were too flimsy to hold her breasts. Out of desperation, she often wore a sports bra. Her breasts were sagging and migrating under her arms.

**Solution:** A Chantelle (style 2981, $88) Dream Tisha bra. Since the cups are the same; a 34C, for example, has a smaller cup than a 38C. Also, cup sizes vary by manufacturer, especially European ones. So even if you think you have the right size, try on a few sizes from different manufacturers.

**Problem:** back bulge

In addition to overhang, her problems included straps that left indentations, cups that rode up, and discomfort.

**Solution:** A Wacoal (style 85567, $38) 44DDD that’s one cup size bigger than she was wearing. Also, the band was increased 2 inches with a bra extender. The cut of this bra is more generous all around, helping to banish all that “back fat.”

**Problem:** gaping cups

After breast-feeding, this woman’s chest shrank, making bra shopping a real challenge. “I’m thinking I might have to jump to the next cup size.”

**Solution:** A new bra type. A shallow cup in the Simone Perele ($75) also has an underwire, which helps lift and fill the cups and gives her a more rounded look.

**Problem:** asymmetry

Almost every woman has one breast that is smaller than the other, but this staffer’s problem was very pronounced. It caused one cup to “dip” from not being fitted out enough; it also caused falling straps.

**Solution:** A new bra type. A shallow cup in the Simone Perele ($75) gave both breasts enough coverage, but didn’t give the smaller one a hollowed-out look. The molded cups also create shape.

3 quick bra fixes

**Problem:** Slipping straps

**QUICK FIX** Try the next size down or a different style. Keep in mind that straps on a demi bra may slip more because they’re set wider.

**Problem:** In-between cup sizes

**QUICK FIX** Try brands that carry half-cup sizes, like the Playtex Thank Goodness It Fits line.

**Problem:** Snug band

**QUICK FIX** If everything else feels right, invest in a bra extender. It’s just a few dollars and it attaches right onto a bra’s hooks.

REAL WOMEN, REAL SOLUTIONS

See what a major difference the right bra can make!

With the help of bra-fitter extraordinnaire Linda Ruby, owner of Dorothy Stein in Scarsdale and Mount Kisco, NY, a 100-year-old bra store, these women got the bra interventions they needed. In some cases, the sizes were wrong. But even when the size was right, the style was often wrong, making the bra feel uncomfortable and creating a shape that wasn’t as flattering as it could be. Check out our brave staffers’ transformations, at right. For more troubleshooting tips, see “3 quick bra fixes,” on the next page.
Is a bra splurge worth it?

Not necessarily. Here’s what we found when we took apart three bras and put them through several washes, based on the care instruction labels. We also had an expert who’s been in the bra business for more than 50 years (seriously!) have a look and tell us what she thought.

La Perla Vintage For the high price tag you get top-quality materials, nicely contoured cups, and a flexible, well-padded underwire that won’t cut into your skin. But this bra didn’t hold up well to even gentle hand washing. After three washes, the elastic material in the back of the bra twisted and curled up, and the stitching on the straps puckered.

Victoria’s Secret IPEX demi In this midpriced range, we got cozy fabric and pads that provide coverage without bulk. But the fabric around the underwire is thinner than the other bras we looked at, so the wire may pinch. The strap stitching was flimsy. Also, the straps curled and the poor cut of the fabric on the sides caused the bra to pucker in the wash.

Gilligan & O’Malley (sold at Target) This bra had better cup molding than the Victoria’s Secret bra, and the underwire was flexible and well-padded, so it won’t pinch or poke. It also held up better after several washes than the other bras. Given the price, this was by far the best deal.

73% of women spend less than $30 on each of their bras. On average, women buy four bras every year.

When to give it the heave-ho

Experts say you can expect to get only six months to two years out of any bra, no matter what you spend. Here are four signs it’s time for a replacement.

THE COLOR CHANGES. White bras will start to look a dingy shade of gray; nude, black, and other colors will start to fade.

THE FABRIC STRETCHES OUT. The band may not feel as tight as it used to, and it may ride up in the back, and the straps may slip off your shoulders no matter how they’re adjusted. Or the fabric around the underwire may get twisted around in the wash. That may seem like a small detail, but the bra won’t sit the same way and may give you less support.

THE FABRIC LOOKS WORN. You risk getting jabbed by the underwire, and once the fabric starts getting threadbare, your chances for show-through increase.

IT’S TOO TIGHT OR TOO LOOSE. Your bra may be in perfectly good shape, but maybe your figure has changed. Perhaps you’ve gained or lost weight, had a child, or had breast surgery. There are bras specifically designed for implants, such as the Le Mystère No. 9 Collection.

75% of women say that they toss their bras within two years.

CUP CARE

Get more mileage out of your unmentionables by washing, drying, and storing them the right way.

Do use a gentle detergent. It doesn’t have to be a specialty product like Woolite, but be sure it’s mild and has no bleach. And follow the care instructions, or you may have trouble if you decide to return the bra.

Don’t put bras in the dryer. The heat wreaks havoc on the elastic. That said, 53% of women wash their bras after two or three wearings; 15% go four or more wearings.

Don’t wash your bras in the washer so it won’t hook onto other things, like a lingerie bag or another bra.

Don’t wash your bras in the laundry bag. It keeps them from getting caught around the agitator in a top-loader.

Don’t wear the same bra two days in a row. You don’t need to wash them every day (every other or every third wearing is fine), but rotate bra so they have a chance to rest a day. Perspiration can cause elastic to deteriorate.

Do store bras properly. Fold them in half with one cup inside the other, or stack them in a row so the cups fit into each other. That will help them keep their shape.

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De use cold water. Most bras aren’t heavily soiled, so they don’t need hot or warm water. And cooler temperatures are less likely to wear out the fabric.

De use the gentle setting. There’s less agitation and the cycle is a bit shorter.

De store bras properly. Fold them in half with one cup inside the other, or stack them in a row
Support and encouragement

Check out these 5 reasons to go bra shopping now

We’ve come a long way since the early 1900s, when bras were made from a couple of handkerchiefs sewn together. Here are some of the latest advances in bra design. (Note: We didn’t test these bras in our laboratories.)

STITCH-FREE TECHNOLOGY
These bras are completely seamless so they shouldn’t rub. And with no show-through lines, they’re perfect to wear under knits and T-shirts.

Give these a try:
1. Wacoal iBra, $50
2. Maidenform Smooth Bra, $25

SUPER SOFT FABRICS
Bras made of these fabrics sit better under clothes—no bumps or crinkles—and feel nice against your skin.

Give these a try:
3. Maidenform Dream Bra, $32
4. Playtex Thank Goodness It Fits Super Soft Microfiber, $28

COMPRESSED FOAM
It gives bras great shaping, without creating an unnatural “armor” effect.

Give these a try:
5. Chantelle sty. 2575, $68
6. Hanes All Over Comfort Bra, 2 for $20

IMPROVED GEL PADS
They give you the same lift and cleavage as traditional gel pads, but they’re much lighter, making the bra more comfortable.

Give this one a try:
7. Wonderbra Light Lift, $30

EXTRA CONCEALING
Concealing Petals on the inside of the cups prevent any nipple show-through. And the petals come in a range of skin tones.

Give this one a try:
8. Bali Concealers, $32

58% of women say they never or rarely match bras and panties.

42% of women say their bra size has changed in the past five years.

80% of women say they’d never go out in public without a bra.

The three styles every woman should own

NUDE BRA
Lots of women make the mistake of wearing a white bra under their white T-shirts and tops, but a beige tone is a better choice because the outline won’t show through your shirt.

BLACK BRA
Black blends in better than any other color with black clothing. Pick a plain style if you don’t want it to stand out. Bolder? Try a lacy black bra and let it show through.

CONVERTIBLE BRA
This is a wardrobe must since it can be adjusted to suit what you’re wearing. Hook one strap from the upper corner of one cup around the back of your neck to the upper corner of the other cup, just like a halter.