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# Staying Abreast of Things

## Investing in a Quality Sport Bra

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Article appeared in Polare magazine: August 2002 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



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**T**he first sports bras appeared in the late 1970's were based on the male jockstrap. Now there are many types on the market. There are, however, basic design factors that should be considered when choosing a sports bra based on overall structure and fit. Ironically, the most popular sports bras being worn in the gyms today are designed more for appearance than support. Depending on the individual's specific needs, support and sizing should be the major considerations. Appearance should be secondary. Sports bras are of two major design types: compression and encapsulation.

*... taking care of your breasts now will ensure their pleasing shape and appearance many years ahead.*

The compression-type bra is designed to restrict movement of the breasts by flattening them against the body. This design may be more effective for smaller breasted women, sizes A or B. However, larger breasted women, sizes C and above, need more support. The encapsulation design bra normally has molded cups that support and separate the individual breasts. This type may be more effective for large breasted female athletes than the compression bras.

Basically, sports bras attempt to limit breast movement by holding them to the body. The fabric used can affect the effectiveness of the support and should be closely considered

when choosing a bra. It should have enough elasticity to accommodate upper torso movement but prevent breast movement.

It should also allow the skin to "breathe" since perspiration may increase during most physical exercise. Lycra and Coolmax are two fabrics that allow sweat evaporation and are commonly included in sports bras, especially under the arms and in between the breasts.

Some bras contain vented panels, such as mesh. These may enhance perspiration evaporation.

Also, cotton is recommended as the primary fibre because it is non-allergenic to avoid rashes.

The sports bra should be sufficiently elastic in the horizontal plane to allow for chest expansion while breathing. On the other hand, elasticity in the vertical plane should be limited to minimize vertical breast movement. Straps should have limited elasticity as well for the same reason.

To prevent chafing, cups should be seamless or have covered seams. Cotton lining in cups also helps prevent discomfort during exercise. Fasteners, hooks and underwires should be covered to avoid irritations.

Some women prefer cross-strap bras, or commonly called "racerback" straps, because they do not slip off the shoulders during activity like some of the conventional style straps. Some women also find the cross-strap designs more supportive.

In either style, the front straps should be positioned so that they lie in a direct line of pull over the nipples, allowing for optimal vertical breast support. The strap fabric should also be wide to allow for greater force distribution.

Regardless of a sports bra design, if it is the wrong size it will be ineffectual. Probably one-half of all women in the gym wear the incorrect bra size. Wearing the wrong-sized sports bra reduces its ability to effectively minimize breast movement. As well, the sizing system used can be confusing. Some brands size their bras very generally, for example, as small, medium and large. For small-breasted women who wear a compression-type bra, this may be adequate. However, larger breasted women who require more support have to consider cup size (usually A-D and up) and the measurement around the bust (generally a dress size measurement).

Unfortunately, these two measurements are relative to each other. In other words, a B-cup is not the same across all dress-size measurements. As well, for a female bodybuilder whose chest/back measurement is normally larger than the average woman's, finding a cup size to fit her often presents problems.

The best approach is to talk to other female athletes who are of similar size and search for the brands that best fit and support their needs. Additionally, always try on a prospective sports bra. Consider shrinkage as well. I prefer bras made of cotton, but I found quickly

that they would shrink. I therefore choose a size accordingly. Another consideration, especially for those whose breast size may fluctuate due to changes in breast volume (influenced by hormones or dieting), is to have bras of two sizes to accommodate breast size differences.

An additional consideration is breast implants. " Take good care of them!" choose a good supportive encapsulation-type sports bra, preferably with light padding to protect the tissue from compression or direct pressure of certain movements and equipment.

Wide straps are also recommended to restrict vertical movement of the breasts and chafing of nipples. Consideration of a suitable sports bra design and fit can enhance enjoyment and reduce embarrassment when participating in physical activity. As well, taking care of your breasts now will ensure their pleasing shape and appearance many years ahead. So invest in a proper sport bra to wear when exercising.

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Polare Magazine is published quarterly in Australia by The Gender Centre Inc. which is funded by the Department of Family & Community Services under the S.A.A.P. program and supported by the N.S.W. Health Department through the AIDS and Infectious Diseases Branch. Polare provides a forum for discussion and debate on gender issues. Unsolicited contributions are welcome, the editor reserves the right to edit such contributions without notification. Any submission which appears in Polare may be published on our internet site. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Editor, The Gender Centre Inc., the Department of Family & Community Services or the N.S.W. Department of Health.

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