



UNIVERSITY SPORTS MEDICINE Choosing a Sports Bra

What should I be looking for in a sports bra?

A good sports bra should:

- provide support and comfort during vigorous physical activity
- allow for the evaporation of sweat
- minimize chafing.

Since we all come in many shapes and sizes, finding a good sports bra is a challenging task. Many sports bras put more emphasis on fashion than function. Unfortunately, sizing and styles often cater to women with small breasts.

In general, sports bras come in two basic designs: encapsulation and compression.

- Encapsulation models have two cups (just like typical bras). The thought is that two small masses are easier to control than one large one. Properly fitting underwires or a firm chest band assist with support. Large-breasted women will find good support with this style.



- Compression models basically press your breasts flat to your chest (in an attempt to reduce motion). You typically pull them on over your head. Women who wear a size A or B cup often do well with compression bras. This bra can be worn alone (without a t-shirt) for coolness and unconstricted movement. However, some women don't like the "flat as a pancake" look of compression bras or struggle to get a small stretchy bra over a broad torso.

Which model is right for you depends upon the type of sports activity you're performing, your size, and personal preference. High-impact sports such as jogging, basketball, aerobics, volleyball, etc. will obviously require more support than activities such as walking, cycling, weight-lifting, etc. Some women find that wearing two bras during vigorous exercise can be helpful when their breasts are sore or tender. They wear an encapsulation model next to their skin, and then a compression bra pulled over that!

What should you be looking for as good features of a supportive sports bra?

- Smart seam placement - *not* over your nipples.
- Wide non-elastic shoulder straps.
- Breathable, wicking fabrics (Coolmax™, etc.).
- Ample armholes.
- Covered hooks or fasteners (if present).

How can you tell if a bra provides proper fit and support?

Take the “jump test”! That is, jump around right in the dressing room, wave your arms up and down, or perform whatever activity you’ll be doing. The bottom line for a sports bra is that you should feel secure, and there is minimal breast movement. This requires more support and durability than found in your everyday bra.

To find your bra size, measure around your chest just under your breasts and add five inches. To determine your cup size, measure around your chest over the fullest part of your breasts. If this measurement is 1 inch larger, you’re probably an A cup, 2 inches = B cup, 3 inches = C cup, and so on. Compression style bras often just come in S, M, L, and XL. Try on several models to decide which one fits your shape and sports style.

Consider these fit tips when trying on a bra:

- The cup should completely contain the breast. If you’re bulging out of the tops or sides, the bra is too small.
- Take some deep breaths. The bra should be snug but not constricting.
- Does the bra cut into the skin near your armpit? You might want to try a different style since armhole chafing is a common complaint with sport bras.
- If you’re wearing an encapsulation model bra, the center piece should lie down next to your breast bone. If it’s away from your body, you should try a larger cup size.
- If the back of the bra rides up, you may want to consider a smaller size.

Where can I find a good sports bra?

Try the foundation department in your local department store or athletic shop geared towards women. If you don’t seem to have much luck, try women’s sportswear catalogs including:

- Title Nine (800) 609-0092
- Junonia (size 14 and up) (800) 671-0175
- Premier Sports (800) 822-7788
- Athleta (888) 322-5515
- X-chrom.com (This is a website with an interactive sports bra guide.)