

Breast Health – is your bra right for you?

Communications and Marketing

Over half of women in the UK who take part in sport are at risk of losing natural elasticity because they don't wear a sports bra (MORI, 2000). Between 70 – 80 per cent still wear the wrong bra size.

Care

To help combat our increasingly sedentary lifestyles, it is vitally important we take regular exercise. Brisk walking and running are excellent ways to stay in shape but have you thought about the impact regular exercise can have on your breasts?

Breasts comprise of soft, fatty tissue. They are supported by the surrounding skin and the Cooper's ligaments which run from the nipples down to the pectoral muscles in the chest.

Repetitive and high-impact activities make the breasts bounce, stretching the breast skin and ligaments. Exercising in – and wearing – an unsupportive bra can cause problems such as chronic back pain, poor posture, neck and shoulder pain, and premature breast sagging as they lose their natural elasticity.

Exercise

It is very important to maintain strength in the muscles in your chest, shoulders and neck in order to provide support for the weight of the breasts. Make an effort to work these muscles to give your breasts the additional support they need.

The following easy exercises can be carried out at your desk or in front of the television:

1. Many of us slump with our shoulders rolled forward. While standing, roll your shoulders outwards so that your thumbs are facing backwards. Push your

shoulder blades back and down. Try to increase the distance between the shoulders as this will help your breasts to sit higher on the chest

2. Place your hands together in a prayer stance. Press your palms firmly together. You should feel tension in your pectoral muscles which are important in supporting the breasts
3. Interlink your fingers behind you. Stretch your arms out and back. You will feel a pull in the front of your chest, which will help reverse any slumping.

Posture

Posture is the position or bearing of the body. Poor posture can lead to mechanical problems, dysfunction and pain from structures that are stressed from slumping or slouching.

Standing and sitting tall can help improve the look of your breasts as you'll be able to carry them higher, thereby giving them greater support. In addition, your posture will be improved minimising the risk of developing pain and discomfort. You can improve the look of your breasts by pulling your shoulders back and down. Don't stick your chest out!

If you are well endowed, an unsupportive bra can cause you to slump or fold your shoulders forward. A supportive bra should hold your breasts firmly in place and help open up your chest.

Picking the right sports bra

There are two types of sports bras:

Compression bras are suitable for small to medium

breasted women (cup sizes 32A - 36B). They help press the breasts against the chest wall to minimise bounce and enhance support.

Encapsulation bras are suitable for large breasted women where there is much more bounce. They help support and hold each breast in a sturdy cup.

The right fit

Wearing the correct size bra will mean you will look great, be well supported and ward off unnecessary discomfort.

Your band size –

Using a cloth tape measure:

- Measure around your body directly under your bust. The tape measure should be parallel to the ground and fit snugly
- Take the measurement, rounding to the closest whole inch (either up or down)

Your cup size –

- Measure around the fullest part of your breasts. The tape should be just touching your bust and be parallel to the ground
- Round the measurement to the nearest inch (either up or down)
- Subtract the band size measurement from the cup size – the difference is your cup size (0-½ inch = AA, ½ - 1 inch = A, 2inch = B, 3inch = C, 4inch = D, 5inch = DD or E, 6inch = DDD or F, etc.)

Booby traps

- In her lifetime, a woman could wear up to six different bra sizes due to factors such as pregnancy, weight fluctuations and gravity. It is important to check your bra size annually and make changes if necessary
- Bra styles and brands vary – when trying on bras, wear them for about five minutes to assess

comfort and fit. Lift your arms up, bend down and jump to see if the bra and breasts stay in place. If you find spillage over, under or at the sides, you will need to re-assess the cup and/or band size. Evaluate bounce control and put on your top to see if the bra looks good. Pick fabrics that are comfortable

- Ill-fitting bra straps can pull or press on your trapezius muscles (running along the neck and back), which can cause pain and discomfort. If you are finding bra straps uncomfortable, placing a shoulder pad under the straps can help evenly distribute the weight of your breasts over the shoulder. If your bra straps fall down, tighten them or change the bra
- Your bra band should be snug and not too tight – make good use of the hooks available. If you find the band rides up, loosen the straps
- Manually position your breasts in the cups to ensure they both sit fully supported and comfortably
- The centrepiece of underwire bras should sit flat against your chest and the wire should rest under your bust. There should be no gaps!
- Many department stores offer a professional bra fitting service. Make use of these services to help find the right bra for you
- Seek out a chartered physiotherapist to get a postural assessment. Visit www.csp.org.uk/physio2u to locate a physiotherapist in your area.

Taking active steps to make sure you are wearing the right bra for your size and shape, and when you exercise, will help you to look great and maintain good postural health.