



# Finding the Right Bra

A bra that fits properly can improve posture, prevent back pain and injury, relieve muscle tension, and enhance your overall look.





Measure around the back, under the arms and across the fullest part of the breasts to determine your full bust measurement.

## Determining Size

A bra consists of a band and cups. Both measurements are important for a good fit.

### Band

To determine band size,

- Measure around the back and rib cage under the breasts.
- Add 5 inches.
- If the band measurement plus 5 inches is an odd number, round up to the next even number.

A well-fitting band should lie flat against the back. If the band is too tight it will pinch into the skin, and if it is too loose it may rise up on the breasts. The placket in the front, between the breasts, should lie flat also. When trying on a bra, use the first hooks or closure on the band. As bras age, they tend to stretch. The additional hooks or closures are provided to tighten the bra as it stretches.

### Cups

To find your cup size:

- Measure around the back, under the arms and across the fullest part of the breasts to determine your full bust measurement.
- Subtract the band measurement (without the added 5

inches) from the full bust measurement.

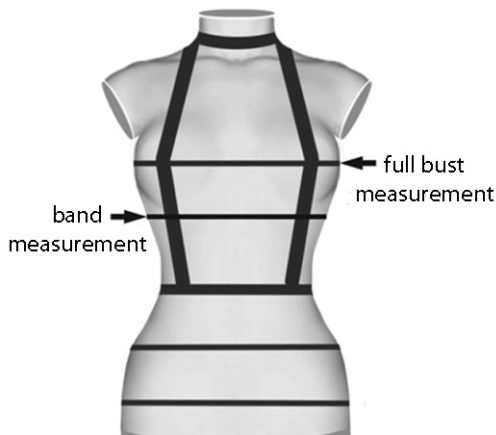
- Use Table 1 to determine your cup size.

For example, if the difference between band size and full bust size is less than one inch, the cup size is AA. If the difference is one half to one inch, the cup size is A, and so on.

Cup sizes may vary according to lining, padding, and elasticity. When trying on the bra, lift breasts into the cup. A cup that is too large will wrinkle and pucker, which can show through clothing. A cup that is too small may be uncomfortable or allow the breasts to squeeze out of the bra, which also can show through clothing. Strap lengths and closures can be adjusted to influence fit and support.

Most lingerie and department stores have trained consultants who can assist in determining bra size and proper fit.

Bras are worn to improve the shape and appearance of a woman's breasts and to minimize jiggling. A well-fitted bra can improve a woman's posture, especially a large-busted woman. A poorly fitted bra may contribute to back problems, muscle tension, sagging breasts and headaches.



**Table 1. Measurements converted to cup size.**

Full bust minus band measurement	Cup size
0 to ½ inch	AA
½ to 1 inch	A
1 to 2 ½ inches	B
2 ½ to 3 ½ inches	C
3 ½ to 4 ½ inches	D
4 ½ to 6 inches	DD or E
7 to 8 inches	G

## Sports Bras

Women who are physically active should wear sports bras. A sports bra is not only a piece of clothing but a piece of equipment that should provide comfort, support, and protection from tissue and ligament injuries. When choosing a sports bra, consider the amount of support needed, the fit, and the moisture control properties.

### Support

The type of support needed in a sports bra will vary according to the type of activity and the size of breasts. Sports bras are rated for low, medium and high impact activities (see Table 2). The higher the impact of the activity, the more support will be needed in the sports bra. A compression sports bra holds the breasts close to the chest and minimizes bouncing for high impact activities. A compression sports bra is recommended for medium- and small-busted women. Large-busted women should choose a bra that separates and lifts, such as an encapsulation sports

**Table 2. Sports bra support rating.**

Type of Activity		
Low Impact	Medium Impact	High Impact
Walking	Skating	Running
Weight training	Bike riding	Aerobics
Yoga	Spinning	Softball
	Tennis	Soccer
	Golf	Horseback riding
		Basketball

bra. Underwires, t-back and cross-back bras also add support for large-busted women. Some women wear more than one bra to achieve needed support.

### Fit

A sports bra should fit snugly, holding breasts in place during activities. When trying on the bra, move arms around, do jumping jacks, or mimic the activity for which the sports bra will be used. The bra should allow no jiggling and should not be uncomfortable during movement.

Straight straps tend to slide off shoulders, making T-back and cross-back sports bras more appealing. If the sports bra has straight straps make sure they are adjustable. Straps and fasteners should not rub or cut into the skin. Look for a bra with minimum inside seams to prevent rubbing and chafing.

### Fabric

There is a wide variety of fabrics used in sports bras. The nylon/spandex fabrics provide a soft luxurious feel with excellent support and shape retention. Cotton/spandex combinations provide the softness and absorption of cotton with shape retention, stretch and support from the spandex. The amount of perspiration is a factor to consider when selecting a sports bra. High performance polyester has moisture wicking benefits that draw the perspiration away from the body. When blended with cotton and spandex, the fabric offers comfort, stretch, shape, softness and optimal fit.



A sports bra is not only a piece of clothing but a piece of equipment that should provide comfort, support, and protection from tissue and ligament injuries.

### Longevity and Care

Sports bras should be cleaned after each wearing. It is time to replace the sports bra when it begins to stretch and no longer provides the needed support or begins pilling. Due to the elasticity, sports bras should be hand washed and hung to dry. Machine washing and drying will shorten the life of the bra.

## Resources

Fogdog Sports (2008). *How to buy a sports bra*. Retrieved from <http://www.fogdog.com/fog-sports-bra-buyers-guide-bg-222940.html> on November 17, 2008

Hirsch, L. (2006). *Finding the right bra*. Retrieved from [http://kidshealth.org/teen/sexual\\_health/girls/bra.html](http://kidshealth.org/teen/sexual_health/girls/bra.html) on November 14, 2008.

Randolph Observer (2008). *Build a better sports bra*. Retrieved from <http://www.randolphobserver.com/mar08/mar08life.html> on November 14, 2008.

The Breast Guide (2002). *Determining correct bra and cup size*. Retrieved from <http://www.afraidtoask.com/breast/breastmeasuringcup.html> on December 5, 2008.



Prepared by: Pam Sigler, M. S., Extension Specialist for Curriculum and Instruction; Kimberly Miller-Spillman, Ph. D., Associate Professor for Merchandising, Apparel, and Textiles and Jennifer Downey, M. S., Graduate Student  
Weight the Reality Series Editor: Janet Tietyen, Ph.D., R.D., Extension Specialist, Food and Nutrition, Family and Consumer Sciences

Graphic by: Rae House and Paige Blackburn, November, 2008

Educational programs of Kentucky Cooperative Extension serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, or physical or mental disability. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Nancy M. Cox, Director of Cooperative Extension Programs, University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and Environment, Lexington, and Kentucky State University, Frankfort. Copyright © 2020 for materials developed by University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension. This publication may be reproduced in portions or its entirety for educational or nonprofit purposes only. Permitted users shall give credit to the author(s) and include this copyright notice. Publications are also available on the World Wide Web at [www.ca.uky.edu](http://www.ca.uky.edu).

Reviewed 11-2020

Photos © Jupiterimages 2011 and Comstock.com