

Getting
the right fit can
make you look
thinner and
feel better!

The **perfect bra** for you



ou're wearing the wrong bra. How do we know? Well, we're pretty sure because most women are. Experts estimate

that 80 percent of us don't know our true size. When we invited a professional bra fitter to our offices and held an open call for women to be measured, our pro said that every one of the 45 volunteers was in the wrong size!

But the real shocker is what a great-fitting bra can do for you. It can help you look thinner and better in your clothes, and can even alleviate neck, back, and shoulder pain that can come from wearing the wrong style or size.

In many cases, women wear bras with bands that are too big and cups that are too small, according to experts, including the one we worked with for this report, Beverly White, a bra fitter in Wappingers Falls, N.Y.

In surveys of more than 60,000 women, Susan Nethero, "the bra whisperer," says she has found that 62 percent have problems with comfort, 46 percent need more support, and 46 percent can't find fashionable bras in their size.

Nethero is the founder of the Intimacy boutiques, which carry 90 bra sizes. But many other stores have a limited size range, which is why so many of us are wearing the wrong bra. And women are often reluctant to seek a bigger cup; going beyond a D may be unthinkable for some. "It's like getting a bad grade in school," Nethero says. "No one wants an F."

But all cups aren't created equal: Cup size is relative to band size. It's not a static measurement. A 34C, for example, fits similarly to a 36B. And fit can vary by bra style. Also, larger cup sizes are more common than you might think. You don't have to be Pamela Anderson to wear a double D, says Nivara Xaykao of Stylesight, a website for fashion trends. So what size are you? Read our easy three-step guide, then check out our amazing bra makeovers.

STEP 1: Get measured

You can get your true size by going to a qualified bra fitter or by measuring yourself. Experts recommend going bra shopping—and being measured—at least twice a year. If you head to a store with trained salespeople, they can not only fit you but also help you sort through the dozens of sizes and styles.

Where to get fitted

Wherever you go, a fitting should be free. You can choose a specialty lingerie shop like Soma, a national chain, or the intimates department of a store that trains its employees. Nordstrom, for example, is known for its expert fitters and great customer service. Another option: local boutiques that specialize in bras, such as Intimacy (in a number of

U.S. cities). Its employees attend a "bra boot camp" and shadow experienced fitters to perfect their technique.

It's smart to be measured every time you go bra shopping because your size can fluctuate, even at different times of the month. And you should try on bras; you shouldn't choose one by size alone.

How to do it yourself

1. Wrap a tape measure around your rib cage just under your bust, keeping it tight.
2. If the measurement is an odd number, add 5 inches. If it's even, add 4 inches. (If it's in between, round up to the nearest inch.) That figure is your band size.
3. For cup size, measure around the fullest part of your bust. Keep the tape loose so as not to

compress your chest, and keep the tape flat and even around your body.

4. Subtract your band size from the cup measurement. Then match the difference to a cup size: 1 inch is an A cup; 2 inches, B; 3 inches, C; 4 inches, D; 5 inches, DD; 6 inches, DDD; 7 inches, E; 8 inches, F; and 9 inches, G.

Another clue about sizing

Your dress size can give you a rough idea about your band size. Size 0 to 2 is usually a 30, 4 to 6 is usually a 32, 6 to 8 is a 34, 10 to 12 is a 36, and so on.

Something else to keep in mind: European manufacturers use slightly different naming conventions for cup sizes, especially for those north of a D, and there's less consistency

between American and European brands. And many American brands stop at DDD, so women with larger breasts may find more options in European brands. Beverly White says she prefers European brands for that very reason and because she likes the quality. You can find conversion charts on many bra sellers' websites.

STEP 2: Find a good fit

No matter how pretty a bra is or how amazing it makes you look, it isn't going to do any good if it doesn't fit properly. Here are six signs that a bra is right for you.

YOUR BREASTS ARE FULLY CONTAINED IN THE CUPS.

If you see gaps or notice that you're spilling out underneath, over the top, or under the arms, it's the wrong bra. Wrinkled or puckered cups are another sign that a bra is too big.

IT DOESN'T SHIFT when you lift your arms.

THE STRAPS HAVE JUST THE RIGHT TENSION; THEY'RE NEITHER DIGGING INTO YOUR SHOULDERS OR FALLING OFF. On a new bra, loose straps can be a sign that the bra doesn't fit you. Look for bras with padded straps (for extra comfort) or narrower ones (to prevent slipping).

THE BAND FEELS SNUG. This is where most—if not all—of a bra's support comes from, not the straps. Fasten a new bra on the first set of hooks, then move in as the bra stretches over time. The band should be positioned low and level across your back. When it rides up at an angle, your front will sag, offering less support. If you can slip two fingers under the band, it's too big.

THE MIDDLE SECTION LIES FLAT. If it's gaping between your breasts, you need a bigger cup size.

THE UNDERWIRE ENCASES YOUR ENTIRE BREAST. It should lie flat against your rib cage and not poke into the sides of your breasts or jab into your upper arms. If it does, it doesn't fit.

5 signs a bra is kaput

"Bras expire, just like makeup," says Jenny Altman, founder of the intimates website ILoveaGood.com. Depending on how often you wear a bra, what it's made out of, and how well you care for it (no dryer time, please!), a bra can last six months to two years. When you start

noticing the following telltale signs, though, it's time to go bra shopping.

- **A slack band.** If you close your bra by using the tightest set of hooks and it still rides up, the band has stretched out too much.
- **Falling straps.** Straps that once fit nice and snug can

lose their elasticity. Those that fall can also be a sign that your band size is too big.

- **Pilling fabric.** Those unsightly little balls are damaged fibers, which is to say the stretch is shot.
- **Jutting, bent, or twisted underwires.** This means the bra's support is gone or that

your cup was too small all along. And, no, underwires can't be repaired.

- **Your body has changed.** If you've lost or gained weight, had a child, or had breast surgery, look for bras that meet your new needs. Nordstrom fitters are trained in finding bras for prostheses.

STEP 3: Know your type

You'll want a few styles in your wardrobe. But some are better suited for you than others.



Plunge Cups are cut diagonally across, dipping lower at the center so that you can wear a deep V-neck or wrap-style top without exposing your bra.

Best for any size when wearing a low-cut neckline.

Worst for the very modest.



Full cup For everyday wear, this style totally covers the breast. Look for an underwire for added stability. Rigid materials like lace provide a firmer fit than, say, microfiber, resulting in a bra that holds up longer.

Best for average-to-larger chests; full-figured women.

Worst for anyone smaller than a B, who might not be able to fill out a full cup.



Balconette or demi These classically feminine half-cups with wide-set straps provide a bit of flattering lift. They often have vertical seaming in the center of the cups to play up the shape of the breasts, as well as decorative details.

Best for petite to average breasts.

Worst for the biggest chests, which may spill over.



T-shirt These versatile, practical models are cut or molded from one piece of fabric and assembled without seams for a comfy garment you can reach for every day. (For maximum wearability, match your skin tone.)

Best for a smooth look under tees and sweaters.

Worst for no one, these days. They come in a wide range of sizes and flatter every figure. (See our comparison of three T-shirt bras on page 37.)



Push-up Amp up cleavage with a bit of padding (or sometimes foam, air, gel, or microbeads) at the bottom of low-cut cups that push breasts together and up.

Best for any size that could use a boost, especially when you're going for sex appeal.

Worst for fuller chests that don't need any added volume. A better choice might be a new style called a lift bra, which puts more padding in smaller cups and less padding in larger ones.



Strapless or convertible

For dressier occasions when showing straps ruins the outfit, consider one of these adaptable styles with straps you can customize or skip.

Best for anyone—there's a size and style out there for you. But depending on the garment, smaller women might want to go without, or try a tapelike product.

Worst for those who never dress to reveal cleavage, back, or shoulders.



Bralettes These unlined little numbers have no underwire.

Best for smaller sizes.

Worst for larger sizes.

WHAT'S HOT NOW

Color (bold reds, pure whites, and denim blues); romantic detail (lace, pretty prints); and vintage-inspired silhouettes ("Mad Men"-era three-quarter-cup bras and bustiers).

amazing makeovers

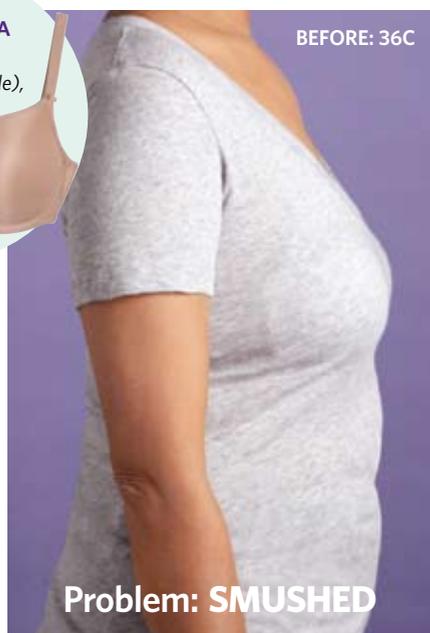
See what a difference the right size, style, and fit can make

Usha, 40

Every woman our bra expert measured was in the wrong size, but Usha was more wrong than most. She was wearing a 36C when she's really a 32G. When cups are too small, the breasts get squished, not supported. Usha often had shoulder pain, plus she never fit into the saris that are part of her Indian culture. As soon as she found out her true size, she bought some new bras and was able to wear a sari during her holiday trip to India. And the shoulder pain is gone! Yes, the right bra does a lot more than just improve how you look.



HER WINNING BRA
Fantasie
FL4510NUE (nude),
\$60



HER WINNING BRA
Amaena Mia-Alexandra 7352
(chocolate/cherry),
\$77

Elizabeth, 45

Most women have one breast that's slightly larger than the other. For those who are a full cup size different, or close to it, a silicone insert—sometimes called a “chicken cutlet”—can help even things out. “I’ve always been self-conscious,” said Elizabeth, who usually wore a padded bra to try to mask the unevenness but found that they never quite fit right. The best part of wearing an insert: “Nobody will know you have it on but you,” said our pro, Beverly White. Another tip: Tighten the strap on the smaller breast. That will keep the cup from gaping at the top and drawing attention to the difference.

PHOTOS: (WOMEN) AIMEE HERRING; (STILL LIFE) JAMES WOBRELL; FASHION STYLING: MIAKO KATO



Shona, 38

Like many women who with large breasts, Shona had been stuffing herself into cups that were too small. It smushed her breasts, creating a “uniboob” effect and a sort of muffin top where she was oozing out of the top of her bra. Plus the straps dug into her shoulders because she hiked them up tight to try to achieve support. “That’s a common mistake,” White said. “The band should do all the work. They hold the breasts up, not the straps.” Shona’s new bra is a 42H, rather than the 42DDD she’d been wearing. And now she looks slimmer and can even breathe better! “I feel less constricted, and I’m naturally standing up straighter,” Shona said. “Plus, no more uniboob!”



Lily, 50

Lily is proof that even women with small breasts can have cleavage. She’s a petite 30B, not even close to the 34A she’d been wearing. The too-big band on her old bras left her unsupported—and support is important no matter what your size. She thought she couldn’t wear an underwire bra because they sat too low on her body and pushed into her rib cage. Lily’s

winning bra is from The Little Bra Company, which specializes in smaller sizes. So Lily has cleavage for the first time but also looks natural, our bra expert said, not like she had a boob job over the weekend.



The right way to put on a bra

1. Fasten the hooks in front, spin the bra around and then pull on the straps. (Some styles have front hooks.) What’s next matters most.
2. Do “the scoop.” Reach into each cup, scoop up all your breast tissue, then bring it in toward the center of your body, and up. You want your breasts to sit up, not lie down.
3. Adjust straps so that they lie flat but don’t feel tight. If you see any puckering skin at the top of the cups, smooth it down, moving upward toward the straps.
4. Reach behind to pull down your bra strap so that it’s level with the front. Your breasts should be halfway between your shoulder and your elbow. Adjust straps if needed.



Kristina, 42

Kristina had so much trouble finding bras that fit and felt good that she wore sports bras pretty much every day. But they weren't giving her any support. Most women really need an underwire to provide that support and lift, our expert says. With the first new bra she tried on, Kristina learned that she could wear a proper bra and feel comfortable and supported. Our pro put her in a plunge style, which helps to create cleavage and fullness at the top of the breasts, a nice thing as you age, when breasts lose firmness. "I feel like Marilyn Monroe," Kristina said. "And I'm standing up straighter, shoulders back, chin up, all from a simple thing like a new bra!"



HER WINNING BRA

Panache SuperBra
Porcelain 3371 (nude),
\$60

Paula, 52

Her "before" bra used to fit her well because she'd been professionally measured and was wearing a quality one. But Paula had lost weight since then and hadn't downsized her bras yet. It turns out she's a 34 band now instead of a 36.

In her new, smaller bra, she looks slimmer because her small waist is more obvious now that her breasts are up where they belong. "This is the bra for me," Paula said—unless she loses more weight, of course. (If your weight is fluctuating, White recommends buying just two bras so that you're not investing too much in something that might not fit you for very long.)



HER WINNING BRA

Elomi Caitlyn
EL8030 (purple),
\$66



GREAT PLACES TO SHOP FOR BRAS

You should have a minimum of three to five bras so that you'll have one to wear, one that can "rest" after being worn, and one or more in the wash. Never wear the same bra two days in a row. For a better selection of sizes and styles, shop online. These sites meet our requirements for privacy, disclosure, and service:

BRASMYTH.COM

Best for everyday bras
Shop here for bras to fit every

mood. Join the Free Shipping Club for \$19 annually.
Size range 30AA to 56J
Shipping Starts at \$5.95
Returns 4 weeks from shipping

FRESHPAIR.COM

Best for the perfect fit
The "What's Your Cup Profile?" feature can help you find your perfect fit.
Size range 28A to 52H
Shipping Free
Returns 60 days from delivery; store credit after

LINDASONLINE.COM

Best for hard-to-find sizes
Whether you need a small band, large cups, or anything else, you're sure to find it here. Sort the sale section by size to find deals.
Size range 28AA to 56K
Shipping Flat \$6; free for orders above \$75
Returns 30 days; store credit after

SHOPBOUNCE.COM

Best for no-risk shopping

Send back anything for up to a year for any reason.
Size range 30AA to 46 DD+
Shipping Starts at \$4.95
Returns Up to 1 year

TOWNSHOP.COM

Best for discontinued faves
Can't find your beloved bra? Click on Going, Going ... Gone.
Size range 28A to 48I
Shipping Flat \$6; free for orders above \$99
Returns 30 days from purchase; store credit after

bravo bust?

We took the labels off bras ranging from \$13 to more than \$100 and asked a professional fitter, a textiles expert, and a few staffers to compare them. The surprising results:

Gilligan & O'Malley (Target), \$13

Style Women's Favorite Basic Fashion Bra
Colors Various.

Pros It looks a lot like the Victoria's Secret one at right in terms of styling and construction, and it held up just as well to washing as the pricier bras. Just one of the women who tried it guessed it was the cheapest of the three.

Cons No one said they'd buy it. Some had fit concerns; others said they preferred softer fabric. Our bra fitter said she could feel the ends of the wire through the fabric.

bargain buy



Victoria's Secret, \$48

Style Showstopper Full Coverage Bra
Colors Various, plus prints (\$52), and embellished (\$55) styles.

Pros The staffers all thought this was the most expensive bra. And three out of four said that it had the most appealing styling and that they would buy it.

Cons Our textiles expert found that part of the fabric behind the hooks changed color after washing. Our fitter said that while she appreciated the soft fabric behind the hooks, she worried the thin underwire might break.

staff favorite



La Perla, \$119

Style Souple Full Cup Bra
Colors White, black, and nude.
Pros None.

Cons Although this was by far the priciest bra we looked at, three of the four women who tried it thought it was the least expensive. Three guessed the price was \$25; one said \$15! They liked the soft cotton and the lace detail, but two said that they preferred a lining. Our bra fitter said that the lace on the one she looked at was starting to tear and that it lacked details like soft backing under the hooks and thicker material on the underwire.

least loved



BOTTOM LINE
Paying more doesn't always get you a better bra.

Note: We washed each bra three times according to instructions, using Seventh Generation Powder Detergent, which claims to be gentle for lingerie and is recommended by our test labs.