



Sports support

CHOOSING THE RIGHT SPORTS BRA IS SERIOUS BUSINESS. HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW.

BY JOANNA BECKET

A lot has changed since 1977 when runners Hinda Miller and Lisa Lindahl stitched two jock straps together to create the first sports bra and called it the Jogbra, launching an industry that has helped facilitate women's participation in sports and fitness worldwide.

Today, as women are making a conscious

choice to live more active lives, they remain largely unaware of the role that a sports bra plays in their performance, health and sense of well-being.

The reality

While sports bras have come a long way in three decades, there's still room for improvement. Despite the technological advances and countless options available, many women aren't getting the support they need. Research shows that over 50% of women experience breast pain when running and working out, leading many to take pain medication or stop exercising.

As sports bra designers and manufacturers create new high-performing products and improve consumer education, researchers are studying the effectiveness of sports bras and

the vital link between breast health and breast movement during exercise.

The research

"It is only recently that bra design has turned to science," comments University of Portsmouth sports scientist Dr. Joanna Scurr. In one study, Dr. Scurr proved that breasts bounce far more than expected – up to 21 cm versus the 16 cm measured in previous tests. Bras are designed to stop breasts from bouncing, but studies prove they also move side to side and in and out. Repetitive movement of the breasts during exercise can cause discomfort and pain. It also stretches the breast's natural support structure called the Cooper's Ligaments, causing permanent sagging. Breast size is not a factor. Studies have also shown that breasts move as much

during a slow jog as they do during a sprint.

The solution, claims Dr. Scurr, is a properly fitting sports bra. "Sports bras were shown to be successful at reducing breast pain for 80% of women," she confirms. "If women wore the correct form of support...the use of pain medication is reduced and women can be active and lead healthy lives."

The solution

"Not knowing what to look for in a sports bra is still a big barrier for women," says Silvia Ruegger, a former Olympic marathon runner and sports bra specialist with Moving Comfort, Canada. Ruegger talks about women and girls, from their early teens on, dropping out of activities they love because of self-consciousness or discomfort when their breasts move excessively. "It's a huge self-confidence issue," comments Ruegger. Other girls stay active but wear two, sometimes three, bras to control movement. To continue participating in sports, they need a more supportive bra. "We have to let them know what to look for in a sports bra so we can give all women the opportunity to be active," Ruegger adds.

Two basic types

COMPRESSION BRA: usually recommended for A-to-B-cup sizes; presses the breasts against the chest wall

minimizing movement, creating what is commonly called the 'uniboob' look. Pulled on over the head, this type can be awkward for women with dexterity issues or those with larger breasts.

ENCAPSULATION BRA: surrounds and supports each breast with its own cup, in more of a natural 'bra' shape to provide the best support for larger cup sizes.

Ruegger believes the best bras combine elements of both types.

The fit

While some websites feature do-it-yourself sports bra measurement guidelines, it's better to talk to an expert and try on several styles that suit your activity. "It's estimated that up to 80% of us wear the wrong bra size," says Eva

Gyarmathy, Apparel Manager, New Balance, Canada. "Most lingerie retailers, major department stores or specialty retailers will help fit you into the proper sports bra." When trying bras, put them through their paces: run on the spot, do jumping jacks. Figure out which bra delivers the least bounce, the most support and the greatest comfort.

Shoulder straps: should be wide, 'non-slip' (cut at an angle), 'stabilized' (with Lycra-free fabric inserts), adjustable (adjustable front straps optional), and cushioned (for increased comfort).

Post-Op

Women who intend to remain active after breast surgery need sports bras designed with special pockets for prostheses. Janac Sportswear, a Burlington, Ontario-based company focused on this special needs market, offers two-pocket, low-impact sports bras and the prostheses to wear with them (sold separately). The aptly-named Been-a-Boob, a bean-bag style prosthesis made of small plastic pellets wrapped in lightweight fabric, moves like a natural breast. Launched in 2003 by President Janet Cockburn, herself a breast cancer survivor, the Janac Sports Bras and Been-a-Boob prostheses are available at select retailers across Canada (www.janacsportswear.ca).

Janac