Women and Diversity Health

MINI-GUIDE TO
SPORTS BRAS AND BINDING



2025

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Support During Physical Activity

Due to the physical nature of military training and employment, it is likely that some individuals will need to wear a sports bra every day. Others may need to wear a sports bra only for exercise or specific activities.

For those who bind daily, consider changing into a sports bra and/or using kinesiology tape during intense physical activity. Binders are not designed to move with your body and could cause harm, discomfort, or restrict your breathing during exercise.

BINDERS ARE NOT DESIGNED TO MOVE WITH YOUR BODY AND COULD CAUSE HARM, DISCOMFORT, OR RESTRICT YOUR BREATHING DURING EXERCISE.

Sports Bras

Sports bras are designed to support the breasts during exercise by reducing motion and preventing the tissue becoming overstretched. Movement of this tissue during exercise can be both painful and a source of potential embarrassment, which can also become a reason not to exercise. A properly fitted bra is important for comfort, health, and physical performance.

Some individuals can experience pain in the shoulders from bra straps, and those with larger proportions can also suffer upper limb and upper back discomfort. It is very important to wear a sports bra which fits properly.



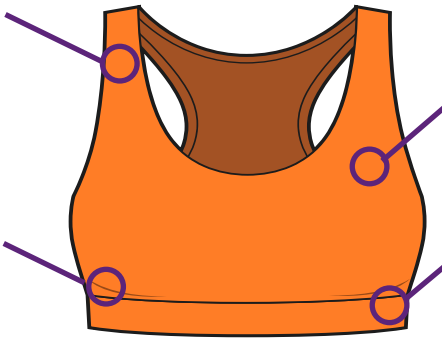
The use of a sports bra should be considered for any physical activity. This includes drill, marching, and any activity that requires jumping, running, or constant movement or exposure to vibration. Crop-tops sometimes look like a sports bra but the construction and material are unlikely to be supportive enough to protect the breasts during a physically active working day.

Choosing the correct sports bra is often based on personal comfort and the selection available. Many bra manufacturers will offer a professional fitting for their brand or provide a size guide that is unique to their product. There are several things to consider when choosing the right sports bra, including size, and intended activity.

FIT

Straps
They should stay in place without digging or slipping.

Under wire
If present, it should sit under the tissue and flat against the chest wall.



Cups
The breasts should fill them without spilling out.

Band
It should be straight and level, not riding up.

IMPACT RATING

Sports bras are rated as either low, medium, or high impact. This refers to the physical activity and movement they are designed for, not size.



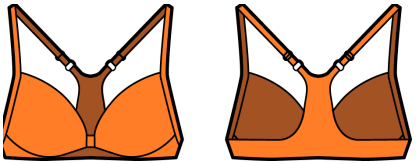
HIGH	running, jumping, ball sports, horse riding
MEDIUM	strength sessions, rowing
LOW	yoga, Pilates, walking

MOST MILITARY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY WILL DEMAND A HIGH IMPACT BRA.

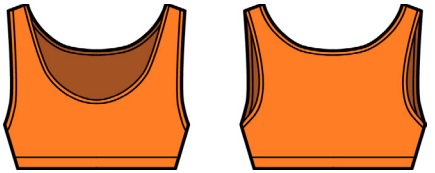
Design

Sports bras reduce movement of the tissue by either enclosing or compressing against the chest wall or a combination of both. People with larger breasts may need to wear two sports bras at the same time to give them enough support, being careful not to restrict their chest movements when they need to breathe heavily.

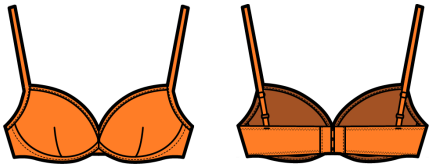
Straps



Racer backs provide enough support in smaller sizes (below a C cup) but for bigger sizes they can cause neck and upper back discomfort during high impact activity.



Vertical straps provide more support for larger sizes (above a C cup) and limit motion.



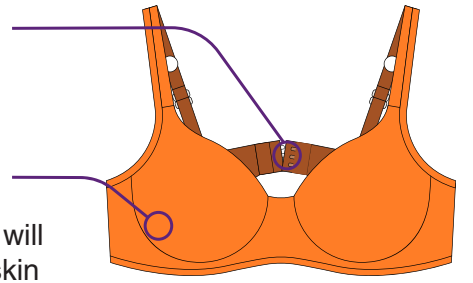
Spaghetti and crossover straps are likely to only provide enough support for smaller sizes during low impact activities.

Fastening

Adjustable straps and clasps along the band are useful to allow for the slight changes in size which can happen throughout the menstrual cycle.

Fabric

The tighter the weave of fabric, the more supportive it will be. Specialized sports fabrics will also help keep the skin and bra dry, which can help reduce chafing and rubbing.



Replacing a Sports Bra

The quality of a bra will reduce with time, use and washing. The sports bra should work effectively for up to 100 workouts. It is time for a new sports bra when the straps become looser around the shoulders, the band loosens against the chest and cannot be adjusted any tighter or when the individual experiences increased shifting during exercise.

DID YOU KNOW?

Entitled members are eligible for funding assistance to purchase bras and binders each fiscal year. If deploying on a named mission for 5 months or longer, members may claim an additional purchase. For more information on the policy, see Frequently Asked Questions about clothing CANFORGENS (mil.ca).

Binding

Binding is a way to flatten the appearance of the chest. Some individuals feel that binding helps them feel more comfortable in their bodies and helps to align their gender expression more closely with their gender identity. It's important to note that, while binding can be affirming for many individuals, it also comes with potential risks if not done with care.





Prolonged or improper binding techniques can lead to health issues such as restricted breathing, back pain, skin irritation, and even long-term damage to breast/upper body tissue and ribs. Therefore, it's important for individuals who choose to bind to do so safely by using properly fitting binders, tape designed for the skin, and taking breaks to allow their bodies to recover.

Binders

Style and function

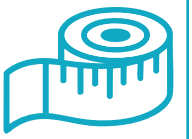


Binders come in half and full-length styles and may include features like clasps, Velcro, or zippers for those who may struggle pulling the binder up or over their head.

Half-length binders are also called tri-top binders. These are ideal for a smaller chest, are lightweight and made of breathable material suitable for warm weather. This can be pulled over your head and positioned around your chest.

The full-length binder fits like a compression tank top which offers more support and may be ideal for those with larger proportions. This is worn by stepping into the top and pulling it up your body, using the straps as handles. Once the straps are over your shoulders, position your breasts so they are comfortable.

Size and fit



Follow the instructions found on the manufacturer's guide for measuring your chest size, as some companies may have specialized methods of sizing. Wearing a smaller size than your actual measurement may not result in a flatter appearance and could be uncomfortable or even cause injury. Your arms and shoulders should move freely, and you should always be able to breathe comfortably while wearing your binder.

Care and Comfort



Your binder can be worn for 8 to 12 hours a day, but never during sleep. If it starts to hurt when you take a deep breath, or if it feels too tight, take the binder off immediately. After removing your binder, stretch out your arms, shoulders, chest, and be sure to take a few deep breaths and cough to clear out any possible fluid build-up in your lungs. Wash your binder regularly and follow the cleaning and care instructions provided by the manufacturer.

Breaks



Breaks are encouraged every few days, so consider a sports bra and layered t-shirts instead. Never use bandages, plastic wrap, or tape that is not intended to be used on skin. Chest or back pain, soreness, numbness/tingling, overheating, skin rash and irritation are signs that you may be binding too often. Book an appointment with your healthcare provider if these symptoms are worsening or interfere with your daily activities.

Binding Tape

If you do not have an allergy to adhesive (glue), or a skin sensitivity/condition, then using kinesiology tape (chest tape, trans tape) is another option to achieve the appearance of a flatter chest. Tape is worn for 3 to 5 days (day and night) and is gently removed using oil (such as coconut oil, baby oil, Aloe). Taping should not restrict breathing and should allow you to move comfortably. It should not be applied directly to the nipple, but rather it requires a strip of padding between the tape and the nipple to avoid damage. Tape can be worn with a clothing binder if desired.



If compression is still required to support tissue during intense physical activity, taping may not be enough on its own. You may wish to consider wearing additional support clothing.

Resources

TransHealthTO Bind Safe
TransCare BC Binding, packing, tucking, & padding



WOMEN AND DIVERSITY HEALTH

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