

Finding a Bra that Fits

BY PAM BAKER PHOTOS BY SETH GRANT



Image is everything in anything: from bedroom to boardroom women try to project just the right image for just the right effect. Despite the seriousness and even enthusiasm we dedicate to image production, our bras often project quite another visual. In the midst of our image build-up, bras can leave us flat.

"Projection is a prime consideration in choosing a bra," says Lea Graves, the corporate trainer of intimate apparel fitters for Parisian and a member of *Elle* magazine's professional panel of bra specialists for this story.

Perky, says our panel, trumps projectile and pendulous. Most women, of course, already know that. So, how come so many of us miss the perky mark? Well...because we like plump even better than perky.

According to our panel of experts from three of Columbus' department stores, Parisian, Dillard's and Macy's, eight out of 10 women wear the wrong-size bra. To be exact, most women favor a too-large band for feigned comfort and a too-small cup in order to create a plumper, fuller bosom. Although over-flowing cups can be reassuring in our reflection in the mirror, it is a gasping sight to behold to others outside the dressing room.

"The demi-bra, fitted properly, pushes up and out for the look most women seek," says Betty Person, specialist in Macy's Intimate Apparel Department in Peachtree Mall. The aim is good cleavage and a natural roundness, not the uni- or quadra-boob look of overstrained cups, says the panel. Enhance, they say; don't exaggerate.

A proper bra-fitting is the surest way to achieve both comfort and good body image. Parisian, Dillard's, Macy's and several other local upscale stores have professional fitters on staff just for the occasion. Most offer walk-in service, but several require an appointment, especially during heavily-promoted bra-fitting "events."

And, it may very well indeed feel like an "event" if you've never done it before. In reality, however, there's nothing to it and it bears the heck out of trying on swimsuits! "Some women are very nervous and act like they are preparing for a mammogram,"

says Gilda Mares, a body fashions specialist with Dillard's corporate office. "But we are very sensitive to our customer's modesty. We measure the customer with top off but bra on and step out of the room while the customer tries on bras."

In fact, that's how all the panel members say the process is done. For very young girls seeking a first bra, the panel says fitters routinely measure the girl over a thin tee shirt so that she never feels exposed.

"We do look at the type of bra you are wearing because that tells us a lot about your preferences and lifestyle. We also adjust the bra straps, if necessary, in order to get a more accurate measurement," adds Gilda.

"The measurement is a guideline, not an exact science," says Lea, and the other panelists agree. After the measurement, the fitters will bring you an assortment of bras to try on to perfect the fit.

The band measurement is taken above the bust and under the arm. The cup measurement is taken from the fullest point of the breast around the body. The fitter then subtracts the band measurement from the cup measurement. Every inch of the difference represents a cup size. For example, if the band measurement is 36 inches and the cup measurement is 40 inches then the difference is 4 inches, a D cup size. One inch difference is an A, 2 inches a B, 3 inches a C and so on.

Life, however, is never that simple; hence the need to try on bras. From the measurement example above, the woman may wear either a 36D or a 38C. The only way to tell is to try on both sizes and judge both for fit and comfort. To make things more challenging, sizes vary between brands. So the woman in our example may prefer a 36D in two brands but a 38C in a third.

"That's why fitters never tell you 'you're a 36C or a 34B' or whatever," says Gilda. Which means we are not defined by the size of our bra after all; an image well worth remembering.

How to tell if a Bra Fits:

A bra fits if the band feels snug, with the hook on the middle group of corresponding eyes, and all of the breast tissue is contained in the cup.

You're wearing the wrong bra size if:

- ...the back of the band rides up, the band is too large
- ...the cups are wrinkled or puckered, the cup is too big
- ...the underwire is poking you or uncomfortable in any way, the bra's too small
- ...you have to touch or re-position your bra at any time during the day
- ...it's the first thing you take off when you get home

You're wearing the right bra size if:

- ...the front of the bra band lies flat against the breastbone
- ...the straps stay in place all day after the initial adjustment
- ...the cups support and lift without flesh escaping the cups

Fashion Note: All bras provided by Macy's at Peachtree Mall, (706) 478-2300.

Beauty Note: Jessica Fowler's hair and makeup by Matt Phillips at Bliss Salon, (706) 653-0306.

...you can put two fingers under the band and pull the band about two inches from your body. More than 2 inches, the bra is too big; less than 2 inches, the bra is too small.

How many bras do you need?

The rule of thumb is that all women need three bras: one in the drawer, one in the wash and one on. In reality, every woman needs a wardrobe of bras for different occasions because each type of bra, from maximizers to minimizers and every sports bra in-between, delivers a different overall look.

Bras are designed to last an average of three to six months. Yet, some women wear the same bra for years. That's a bad idea since bras stretch out of shape over time despite the best of laundering practices. And, weight gain or loss, certain medications, body changes due to age or hormone fluctuations and other factors can change your bra size. Our panelists recommend a professional bra-fitting at least once a year, or as often as you notice changes in your body.

One Fabulous Fit™ Demi Underwire Bra by Maidenform (style 7959 in pastel green) \$29

Extravagance II™ Push-up Wonderbra (style 7624, in color RT7) \$30

Breathe by Barely There™ Wirefree Bra (style 4392 in color ABC) \$28

