



Spire  
Tunbridge Wells Hospital

# The best fit

## Why wearing the right-sized bra can help relieve breast pain and discomfort

Most women suffer some kind of breast pain and discomfort at some time in their life. For some, it is a monthly occurrence; for others an irregular but still unpleasant experience.

But a good-quality, well-fitted bra can help. Here, Mr Haresh Devalia, a Consultant Breast & Oncoplastic Surgeon at Spire Tunbridge Wells Hospital, answers some common questions on the subject of breast pain and bras.

**What are the most common health problems among women who wear ill-fitting bras? Can ill-fitting bras cause back and neck pain?**

Adequate bra support is very useful in relieving cyclical mastalgia. Cyclical breast pain is related to hormonal imbalance and is often experienced before and during menstruation. However, much of the non-cyclical breast pain is also related to the hormonal changes in the body. A wellfitted bra is not going to end the problem, but it could make sufferers more comfortable during such times.

Bra support is also important in women with large breasts as it helps to relieve shoulder and back pain. Unfortunately, more than 70% of women wear the wrong size bra, and that can aggravate the symptoms.

In my surgical practice, I have noticed that bra support is important in reducing the post-operative analgesia requirement. In general, most patients with adequate bra support do not need anything other than paracetamol tablets to help with pain relief. At the Spire Tunbridge Wells Hospital, all patients having surgery under my care get information and advice on bra support to assist pain relief.

**There have been different rumours on the internet suggesting that underwired bras can cause breast cancer. Is there any medical evidence to support this?**

Underwired bras do NOT cause breast cancer! Evidence suggests there is no link whatsoever between wearing a bra and breast cancer. I don't know how these rumours get started but there is no research to support this one.



**Most women experience general breast tenderness at some stage of their lives. Is there a way to reduce or prevent this? Can sports bras help with breast tenderness?**

Most of the breast tenderness is related to hormonal causes. Simple reassurance is all that is required, along with adequate support bra. There is no evidence to suggest that Evening Primrose Oil can help ease tenderness, but reducing fat intake and using phytoestrogens such as soya beans, nuts and cereals or certain fruit extracts can.

**Why is it so important so get a bra that fits correctly? What would you suggest to women who are looking for the 'perfect bra'?**

A perfect bra is one which supports the breast adequately against the chest wall. Wearing the right size bra can help in supporting the natural Cooper's ligaments which run from the breast skin to the pectoral (chest wall) muscles.

Bra size can be accurately measured by using the measurements of the chest wall circumference (measurement taken just below the breasts) and the true breast circumference (the measurement taken at the fullest part of the breasts).

However, as quite a few women experience breast engorgement during their periods which can lead to change in breast size, it is sometimes a good idea to have a larger cup size to get them through that temporary change.

**Is it bad for women to sleep in their bras?**

There is no compelling evidence to suggest that. In fact, one would advise women awaiting a mastectomy and suffering severe pain to wear a bra for 48 hours if the breast pain is excruciating.

**French research has suggested that NOT wearing a bra might actually be better for us.**

French research does indeed suggest that not wearing a bra can improve tone of breast tissue by increased collagen production and elasticity.

One should be cautious in implementing this evidence, though, as the sample size is small and not representative of the population as a whole. Further research and evidence would be needed before we could give clear guidance on this.

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