

**Bra shopping can be a traumatic experience! But, you are not alone! A lot of women wear their bras long past the garment's life span because it's just too difficult to deal with. Or maybe, you just keep ordering the same bra in the same size year after year and hope it's still the correct size for you. Or perhaps your bras dig into your skin or fall off of your shoulders, but you just continue dealing with it while you "lose a few pounds". Does any of this sound familiar? If so, here are some tips to help!**

- The big #1: Get professionally fitted once a year. Your size changes as you age, have children, etc. And let's face it, bras last about a year before becoming stretched. Don't repurchase without being fitted. Look for a good department store. I recommend Nordstrom, but if you don't have one close, choose your favorite department store or go to a lingerie store. I don't recommend Victoria's Secret (unless you're 20). In my experience over the years, they don't do a good job with an accurate fitting.
- Contrary to popular belief, it isn't the straps that hold up the bra. It's the band! The cups hold your breasts in place, but the band is responsible for 90% of the support. The best way to find out if you are wearing the right bra is if your breasts sit still when you slip the bra straps off and walk forward. If they don't, time for a fitting and possibly a change in size.
- If you have large breasts that are causing you back pain - tell your bra fitter! You'll need a sturdier band, NOT thicker straps.
- If you are wearing a bra that has the right band size, you will be able to fit your fingers easily between your straps and back and the strap should only stretch an inch. If you see your bra underwire digging and squeezing into your breast tissue, then that is a sign that your band is too small.
- Bra shopping can get confusing when each brand shows a different size but it strangely fits you even if the size was different before. That is what's called a "sister size". Like jeans, there are wide variations on how different brands fit.
- If your bra does not fit well in the size you regularly wear, you can try one of your sister sizes. The general rule of thumb when you look at your sister size is to go down a cup size if you go up in band size and the other way around. Being aware of your sister size is useful when it comes to accommodating size differences between your bra brands.

- Are your breasts two different sizes? This is more common than you think! It can also make bra shopping super tricky! Here's what the experts say: Buy a bra that fits the larger breast, as you can make up for the smaller size of the other breast by wearing bra cutlets or buying a bra that has removable pads.
- What is a telltale sign that my bra doesn't fit right? The center gore (or panel) at the front of your bra is floating away from you. The gore of a well-fitted bra will lie flat against your chest. If you notice that the cups of your bra are gaping and that your breasts are not filling these cups all the way, you should consider going down a cup size. Wearing your bras past their life span loosens the fit and they don't do the job we want them to.
- Make sure you have ALL the bras you need, that are well- fitted. There is nothing worse than putting on a cute off the shoulder top and realizing you don't have a good strapless bra, or worse one that doesn't fit well. We don't want to spend all day or night hoisting it up! Again, the band holds the breasts here. So you may have to go down a band size to make sure it stays in place. A professional bra fitter can help with this.
- You should have at least two traditional style bras. If you are someone who is super active and has larger breasts, a sports bra could be a great addition to your wardrobe. And finally, you should have a bralette and a convertible bra to wear while lounging at home or with an odd neckline

Now, back to the life span of your bras. Even your most favorite, or expensive bras are not meant to last forever. Depending on the size of your bra, how often you wear it, and how well you take care of them, a good quality bra should last at least a year. Make sure you wash them in a mesh or by hand if possible to get the most longevity out of the bra. You need to also make sure you keep a lookout for any signs that show that your bra is nearing its end. The most important thing is knowing when it's the end, and time to purchase new! Happy shopping!

