

How to Choose A Bra

An intro to bra sizing and styles

WHAT IS A BRA?

A bra is a garment, usually worn under other clothing, that covers, supports, or reshapes one's breasts or chest tissue. Bras have a variety of functional & aesthetic purposes & a rich history in gender presentation. Whether you have worn a bra for years or are exploring bras for the first time, this guide outlines the key styles, components, & sizing intricacies of bra shopping.

BRA STYLES



Training Bra

Simple, padless, cupless bra designed to help young people get used to wearing a bra as their breasts develop. Typically only made in tween/teen sizes.



Bralette

Cupless, wireless bra, possibly with thin removable pads. Comfortable, lightweight, minimal support. May be worn as a top. Good adult alternative to a training bra.



Sports Bra

Support-focused, designed for high-impact movement & full range of motion. Compressive & sweat-wicking. Structure & closure options vary by size.



Moulded Cup Bra

Fixed cup shape, usually with underwire. Smooth, rounded silhouette under clothes, harder to size, less comfortable.



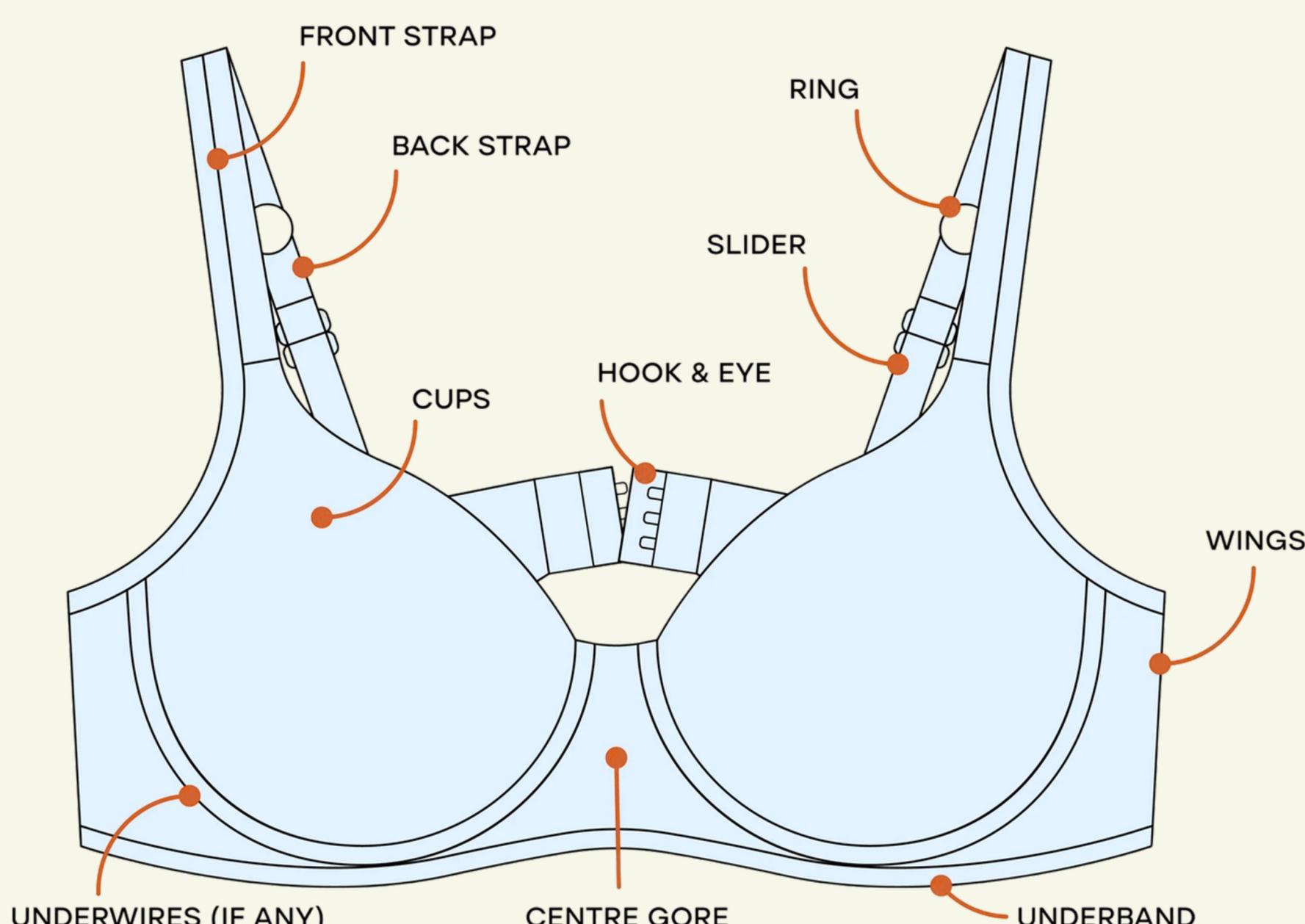
Push-up Bra

Extra padding at bottom of cup to push up & accentuate breast tissue/cleavage.

PICKING A STYLE

When choosing a style, consider what you want most from a bra. For maximum support, look for a structured, snugly fitting bra. For smoothing & shape, look for a bra with a pad or soft cup. For comfort with a natural look, aim for something wireless & stretchy. Different contexts call for different tools, so it can help to have a variety of bras you can switch out depending on what you need day-to-day. Your size may vary from style to style, so be prepared to try multiple sizes when experimenting with new bra styles. While some styles will be more comfortable than others, discomfort, pain, or redness is usually a sign of a sizing issue. Also, your breast size, body shape, & support needs may change over time, so try to reassess your bras for fit & function once or twice a year.

ANATOMY OF A BRA



BRA COMPONENTS

Wires

Wired bras have a curved wire under the cup for structure & support. Wireless bras are good for light support, a soft fit, & natural shape.

Cups

Moulded cups have a fixed shape & give a smooth line under clothes, but can be trickier to find the right fit. Some wireless bras have unmoulded cups, which allow tissue to maintain a more natural profile.

Pads

Bras without a moulded cup may have a removable pad to create a smoother appearance under a shirt. Bras without pads will likely still show the nipple.

Closures

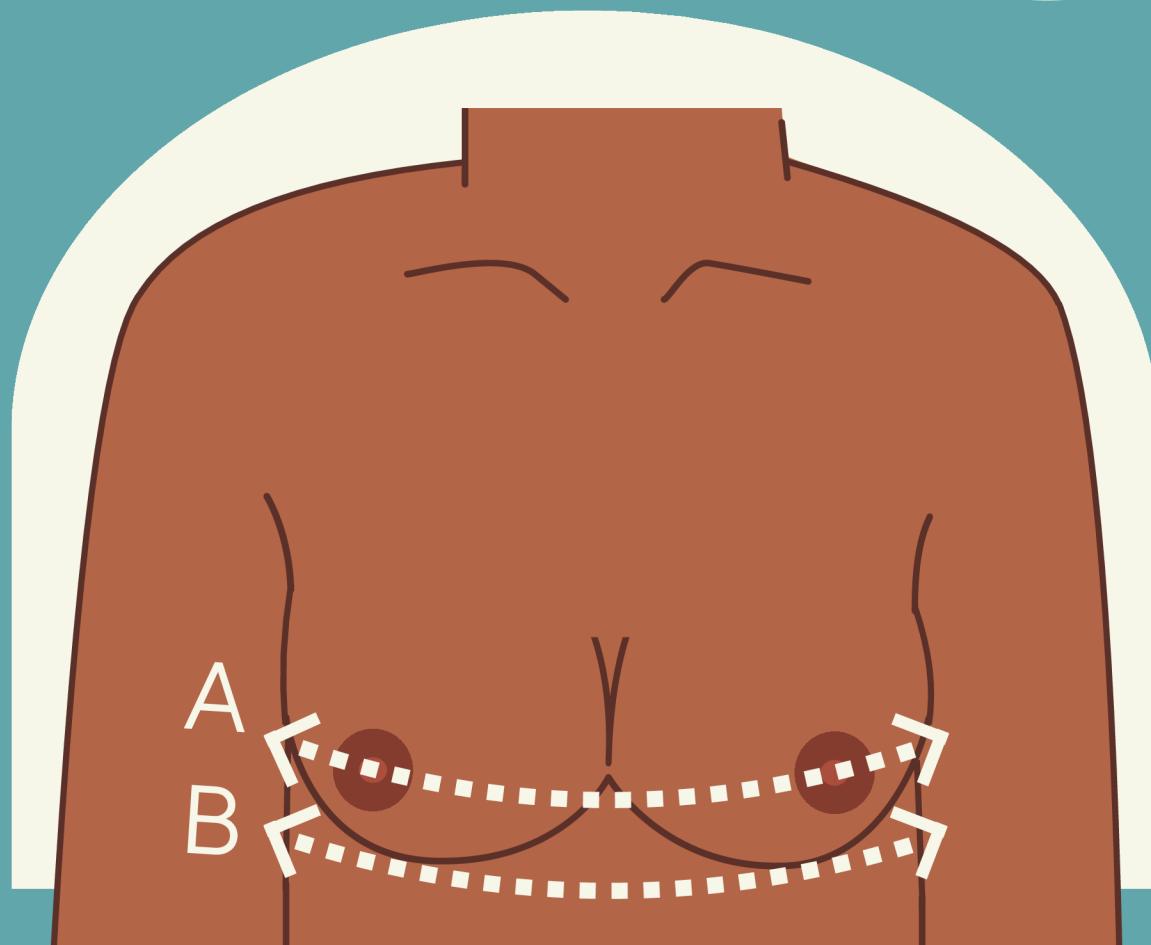
Traditional cup bras have a closure, like hook-and-eye clasps, in the back or front. Sports bras & bralettes, lacking closures, are typically put on over the head.

Straps

Many bra straps are adjustable with a built-in slider. Sports bras & bralettes may have wider, fixed straps.



Bra Sizing



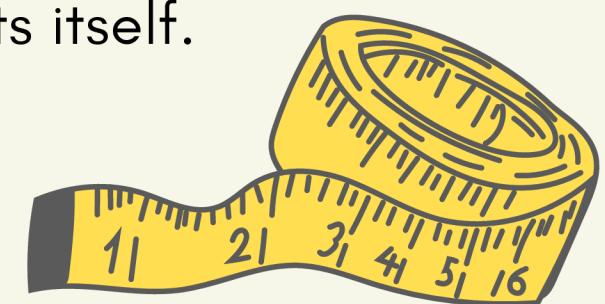
Every breast & body is different, so finding the right bra can be an incredibly personal process. One of the first steps is taking accurate size measurements. The most common measurements are bust & underbust, which are typically taken standing while topless. For detailed measuring instructions & help calculating your size, consult ABraThatFits.org.



MEASURING

A. Bust/Chest/Full Chest - Draw a soft tape measure around your ribcage at the largest part of your bust--usually where your nipples are. Ensure that the measuring tape is at the same level all the way around & is just snug enough not to fall. Take two deep breaths & relax as you exhale, then note where the tape measure meets itself.

B. Underbust - Move the tape measure down to where the bottom of your breast transitions into your chest (inframammary fold) or where the underband of a bra would typically sit. Repeat the methods from measurement A & note where the tape measure meets itself.



FINDING YOUR SIZE

Band Size

"Band size" refers to one's underbust measurement or the circumference around their ribcage under their chest tissue. This measurement makes sure that the part of the bra that is not covering tissue is snug enough around your chest to stay put & provide support. In standard bra sizing, this number will appear before cup size (e.g., 32B, 40GG, etc.). In the U.S., band size is always an even number so you may need to round up or down. An accurate band size is important for comfort & function.

Cup Size

"Cup size" refers to the volume of each cup needed to comfortably fit one's chest tissue. In the U.S., cup size is represented by one or more letters, which appear after the band size (e.g., 32B, 40GG, etc.). Cup size is measured by subtracting the underbust measurement from the bust measurement. Each inch of difference is one cup size so a 40" bust & 38" underbust (2 inch difference) would give you a size 38B. Cup size is proportional to band size, so a 38C will have larger cups than a 34C.

Sister Sizes

Sizing varies across brands so your "true" bra size might not always be the right fit. Sister sizing usually refers to going one size up or down from your "true" size by shifting the volume from the band to the cup & vice versa. For example, to find a smaller sister size for a 38C, you would go down a band size & up a cup size, landing at a 36D. For 38C's larger sister size, you'd go up a band size & down a cup size to get a 40B.

SOURCING

Like with any undergarment for everyday wear, a good bra will be comfortable, well-fitting, & compatible with your clothing. Bras are best purchased in person so you can try on different sizes, styles, & brands. If you don't feel comfortable going to a department store, see if your local thrift store sells gently used bras. If ordering online, make sure to check the company's unique sizing instructions & return/exchange policy. For companies that offer free returns, consider buying multiple sizes at once so you can try on & return the ones that don't fit.

ASSESSING FIT

Great Fit

Band is level all the way around the body, breasts fill the cup without spilling over, straps stay on shoulders without digging in, & the center/gore of the bra lies flat against the chest between breasts.

Too Small

Breasts spill out over the cups, underwire pinches the skin, pain while wearing, or red marks on skin after taking bra off.

Too Big

Breasts don't fill the cups, straps fall off shoulders, bra shifts on body, or lack of security/support.