



Wash bras by hand in mild soap, and drip dry.

"Without actually seeing the problem, I would suspect the [bra's] band was too large," said Lisa Waite, of BraVissimo, in Tucson, reflecting on the "rotating gown" story. "Many women think they should stay in the same cup size their whole life, so they keep going up in band size to accommodate the larger breast."

"It is very common to see a woman who is a 38 or 40 and comes in wearing a 44DDD cup but leaves in a 38J," she added. In poorly fitting bras, women never get any lift or support when the band is too large. She cites another example of a woman who was erroneously wearing a 38A when she fitted much better in a 34B.

Waite's line of work involves as much listening as it does fitting women in bras. Her half-hour fitting appointments include an interview with the client to find out what her bra story is. "Every woman has a bra story," said Waite. It is these counseling sessions that reveal what a woman's priorities are.

"Women don't know what a good fit is," she said. After years of self-service shopping and staying loyal to a cup size they were told they fit in high school, women typically choose the wrong size bra off the shelf and suffer in silence as the back rides up, the straps drop off, the flesh seeps under or the neck aches in pain.

According to Elisabeth Squires, author of *boObs: A Guide to Your Girls*,

85 percent of women are wearing the wrong size bra. Squires is glad to educate women about the proper fit of bras, but laments the ongoing industry bugaboos and pitfalls of fitting.

"You can buy a suit or slacks and have them altered to fit, yet you can't buy a tailor-made bra," she said in a recent interview with *The Desert Leaf*. "We're forced into buying off-the-rack for our racks."

Another problem women face in fitting is the lack of size standards.

"It's not to the manufacturers' advantage to standardize bra sizes," she said, adding that fabric type and quality are variables that affect cup size.

Augmenting the problem of a proper fit further is the fact that no two women are alike; in fact, "No two breasts are alike, even on the same woman," explained Squires.

With so many barriers to a better fit, it's no wonder women need an advocate to get a decent bra.

"If you gain five pounds, you may change bra size, because you gain or lose weight in your breasts first. You're in a constant state of flux, so don't blame your boobs," said Squires.

Though the Wonderbra was a big hit in the 90s, the large- and plus-size bras are now the fastest growing segment of the bra industry.

"Breasts have gotten larger over the last 20 years. The standard size used to be a C. Now the standard cup is an E, and it's not just us — it's a worldwide phenomenon. Even Chinese women have gotten larger," said Squires. She added that larger sized women are significant supporters of the bra business: they buy more bras, and they have more bras in their wardrobe that never did fit right.

"A good bra wardrobe consists of eight to ten bras," said Waite at BraVissimo. She pointed out that once women are properly fitted in a bra they really like, they tend to want to buy eight of the same bra. While she generally

starts clients out with an all-purpose utilitarian bra, she encourages women to step out of their comfort zone to include a variety of bras that work with their entire wardrobe.

### Fitting

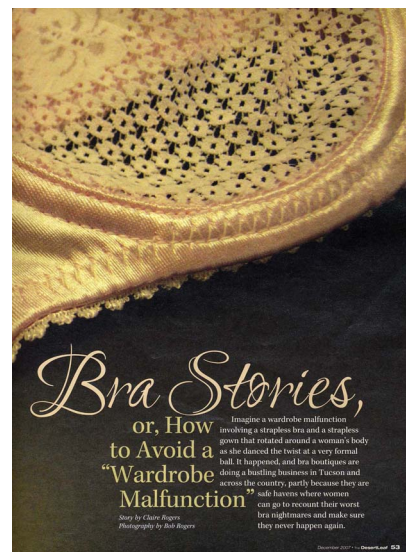
It's hard to believe that all those curves come down to just two numbers: body and bust measurements. The body measurement is taken around the torso, under the bust. The bust measurement is taken around the torso and the fullest part of the bust. The difference between these two numbers determines the cup size: two inches is a B cup, 3 inches a C cup and so on. The bra size includes the body size (sometimes called the band size) and cup size.

According to Catherine Lippincott, spokesperson for Cacique Bras, women should get fitted once a year, and it's best to have someone else do the measuring.

She offers the example of Brooke, a woman who had gained 40 pounds after quitting smoking. She gradually adjusted to the discomfort and the bulges in her clothing. When she finally did get fitted, she found she had gone up two cup sizes. The better coverage and fit of a new bra completely streamlined her look.

"Cleavage is when it is attractive . . . spillage is when it's not," said Waite, noting that women often are unaware of the changes in their bodies. She also said stress is prevalent among women who have to shop for bras, so they tend to put it off as long as possible.

One of her jobs is to educate women about pooching and back fat. "If there is no front pooch or back fat, the bra is too loose," said Waite. Women tend to mistakenly choose a band that is loose enough not to cause any bulging, but then suffer from the band riding up the back or the breast seeping under the band. That seepage, said Waite, is not good for circulation or the health of the breast.



## Bra Stories, or, How to Avoid a "Wardrobe Malfunction"

Imagine a wardrobe malfunction involving a strapless bra and a strapless gown that rotated around a woman's body as she danced the twist at a very formal ball. It happened, and bra boutiques are doing a bustling business in Tucson and across the country, partly because they are

can go to recount their worst bra nightmares and make sure they never happen again.

Story by Claire Rogers  
Photography by Bob Rogers

Elisabeth Squires  
boObs: A Guide to Your Girls  
mammoirs@gmail.com  
www.booksonboobs.com  
206.954.9671



(Although the connection between breast cancer and underwire bras has never been proven, Waite said there is a Tucson doctor who has banned underwire bras from the workplace for that reason. According to the Susan G. Komen Breast Center, the fact that women who don't wear bras have lower rates of breast cancer is more likely because these women are leaner and have smaller breasts. Weight is a risk factor for postmenopausal breast cancer, and breast size is currently under study.)

"Only 10 percent of the support comes from the straps; 90 percent comes from the band," said Waite. The band should feel snug but comfortable. When fitting clients, Waite helps with the correct adjustment of the straps.

"Today, not only are bras needing to be functional for all of the diverse lifestyles of women, but women tell me they want comfort and especially — something European women have known for decades — women want beautiful lingerie," said Katrina Anderson, owner of Bravo Boutique, a full-service lingerie store that specializes in a stressfree spalike bra-buying experience. The Tucson shop opened in September in response to demand for high-end designer bras such as the Italian-made La Perla or the Parisian brand Eres.

When you find just the right bra, how should you care for it? The three enemies of fine lingerie are body oils, water and soap, said Waite. She pointed out that many women will wear the same bra for several days in a row, allowing oils to build up and break down the fabric sooner than necessary. To help your bras last to their full potential, Waite recommended letting your bra air for a full day or more between wearing to allow moisture and oil to evaporate. With proper care, a good bra should last a year to a year and a half.

"Most women don't take care of their lingerie. They throw it into the laundry

with everything else," said Squires.

Lingerie is too often exposed to large quantities of water and soap and is at the mercy of the agitation in a washing machine. The best way to wash a bra is to handwash it for two minutes in gentle lingerie soap. Hang it from one strap in the shower to dry.

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*Claire Rogers is a local freelance writer. Comments for publication should be addressed to letters@desertleaf.com.*



Buy bras fitted to close at the outer eyes, then use the middle and inner eyes as the fabric stretches.

### *Bra-Fitting Tips*

"When getting fitted for a bra . . . go to someone who's seen lots of breasts to get properly fitted," offers Elisabeth Squires, author of *bOObs: A Guide to Your Girls*.

Bring in the specific article of clothing with which the bra will be worn.

Be ready to describe the most common problems you have with bras and know what your priorities are.

Buy a bra that fits you well, starting with the outermost hooks and eyes. As the bra stretches, use the middle and finally the inner eyes. Don't start with a bra that fits first from the middle eyes expecting to lose weight. If you lose or gain weight, get new bras.

Stagger the purchase of your bra wardrobe, so you don't have the financial stress of having to buy all your bras at once.

— Claire Rogers

Elisabeth Squires  
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mammoirs@gmail.com  
www.booksonboobs.com  
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