

BREAST HEALTH TOOLKIT

# SPORTS BRA FITTING GUIDE

WOMEN & GIRLS HEALTH & WELFARE RUGBYSAFE TOOLKIT



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# 1. What is a Sports Bra?

The primary purpose of a sports bra is to support the breast, i.e., to reduce the movement of the breast by holding it in position when exercising.

Sports bras work to reduce the movement of the breast in two different ways. Firstly, to compress breast tissue towards the chest and secondly to encase, lift and hold each breast separately.



For information about provisions relating to players' dress visit [World Rugby Regulation 12](#)

## Types of Sports Bra

There are three types of sports bra:

### 1. Compression    2. Encapsulation    3. Combination

#### 1. Compression

**Compression sports bras** compress breast tissue towards the chest and look like cropped tops. There is little or no structure inside them.

These bras tend to contain no fasteners, so the underband cannot be opened and closed. Instead, they require you to pull them on over your head and shoulders. The problem is that the key support in any bra comes from the underband.

Ideally you want the underband to be firm fitting and quite tight. However, this can make it difficult to get the bra over your head and shoulders. Consequently compression bras usually have a slightly looser or stretchier underband but the more stretch the less the support.

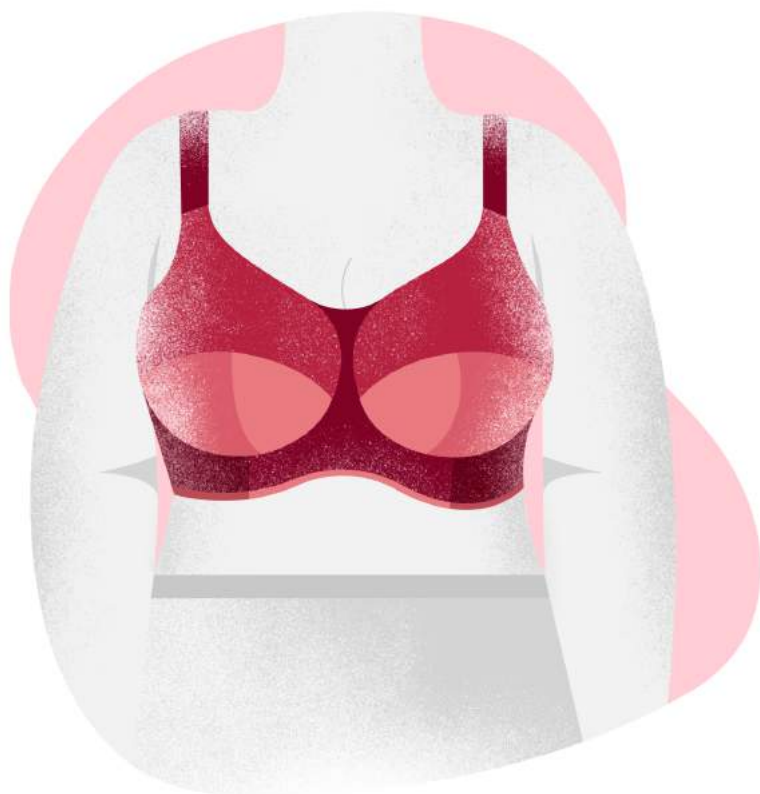
Compression bras are easy to fit and come in XS, S, M, L, XL sizes, although if you are cup size B or above they provide insufficient support and are not recommended.

In choosing this type of bra be aware that compressed breast tissue doesn't get smaller but redistributes itself. The stretch in the underband allows for this so that the breast can move upwards, or outwards, or inwards.





## ... What is a sports bra?



### 2. Encapsulation

Bras that encase, lift, and hold each breast separately to reduce breast movement are called **encapsulation sports bras**. They are like an everyday bra and contain cups that separate the left and right breast. Rather than compressing the breast tissue, they lift the breast tissue off the chest wall and hold it in place.

As they contain less stretch, they tend to be stiffer, which can be more effective at reducing breast movement. However, because the bra has less stretch, it makes it more important to get the fit right. The lack of stretch in the cups means that you should look to match the cup volume (size) with the volume (size) of your breast. This isn't always easy!

Encapsulation sports bras are harder to fit than compression sports bras and are offered in cup and band sizes. However, as they have adjustable underbands and shoulder straps they tend to fit better and to provide superior support.

### 3. Combination

**Combination sports bras** contain a combination of compression and encapsulation. They may look like a crop top, but when you turn them inside out you can see the cup moulding or seaming. They are a good compromise as they contain some stretch, an improved fit, and some encapsulation.

Depending on the brand they:

- ✔ Are available in XS, S, M, L, LX sizing or in cup and band sizing.
- ✔ Come with or without adjustability in the underband or shoulder straps.
- ✔ Can be pulled over the head.
- ✔ Have a fastener to open / close the underband and make it easier to get off.



# 2. Sports Bra Comparison Table

If you are in doubt about which type to go for, the comparison table below is a useful summary of the key features of a sports bra and which type of bra offers them.

- ✓ **Tick** - this bra is likely to offer the features listed.
- ✗ **Cross** - this bra is unlikely to offer the features listed.
- **Dash** - this will vary depending upon the manufacturer.

	Structure	Support	Fastener	Stretch	Separate Cups	SIZE XS, S, M, L, XL	SIZE B +	Easy to fit
Compression	-	-	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓
Encapsulation	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✗	✓	✗
Combination	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓





## 3. 10 Sports Bra Tips

Rugby is a highly dynamic activity whatever your position and so you should opt for a high support sports bra. A combination sports bra is probably the best option for rugby.

- 1** Look for a high support combination sports bra that doesn't contain too much stretch and has some moulded or structured cups on the inside.
- 2** Go for a sports bra with a fastener because this will help to get the bra on and off, it will also improve the support and stop the underband stretching out over time.
- 3** Go for a sports bra with a fastener at the back - avoid front or side fastening bras.
- 4** Avoid underwired sports bras - so as not to injure yourself or others you come into contact with. See [World Rugby Regulations](#).
- 5** Remember padding in a sports bra is for modesty (nipple concealment), it doesn't provide any breast protection.
- 6** Racerbacks are the most popular shoulder strap design for sports bras. Racerbacks are great for rugby because the shoulder straps can never slip off the shoulders.
- 7** Look for sports bras with minimal extra components e.g., clasps, hooks, D rings etc. as these could dig in during a tackle.
- 8** Moisture management is important to help reduce rubbing and chaffing, particular in the summer.
- 9** The higher the neckline of a sports bra the more support it provides, additionally a high neckline ensures modesty when bending forwards.
- 10** Wide, padded shoulder straps are great for rugby players to prevent excessive pressure on the delicate tissue of the shoulders.



# 4. How to find the right Sports Bra fit

To establish a good sports bra fit we don't bother with measurements. Instead, we believe it doesn't matter what the bra size is, it is about whether it fits you or not. Here are four simple steps to fitting your sports bra:

## STEP 1 Check the underband

This is where the support comes from. You shouldn't be hanging your breasts from your shoulders, instead the underband should act as a shelf on which your breasts are supported. The underband should be tight enough so only two fingers can comfortably fit underneath it and it should remain level all around your body, even when you are moving.

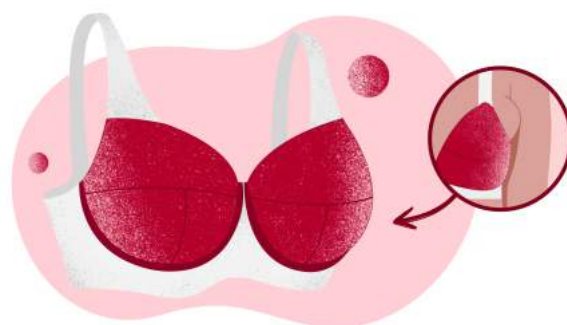


## STEP 2 Check the shoulder straps

Like the underband you should only be able to comfortably fit two fingers underneath the shoulder straps. Remember to adjust the shoulder straps if you have the option. When adjusting the shoulder strap it is okay if one is shorter than the other as the left and right breast are often different sizes.

## STEP 3 Check the cups

The most common fitting mistake is to wear bras with cups that are too small, this can squash the breast and cause breast tissue to spill out of the bra. If the cups are too big you will see wrinkling of the cup material, or they will hang away from the breasts. You are aiming for a snug fit!



## STEP 4 Check the centre front

This is very important for encapsulation sports bras. Check the centre front of the bra so that it sits flat on the chest. If it is lifting away, the cups are too small.

## ... What is a sports bra?

### Sizes and Colours

Across brand makes there are different sizes, styles and colours. Whilst it means there is a solution for everyone, it makes finding your perfect fit harder.

Be aware that some brands offer sports bras in XS, S, M, L, XL, whilst others offer sports bras in cup and underband sizes, e.g., 34B, 30DD etc.

### Body and Breast Shape

As we come in all shapes and sizes you may need to go for a cup and underband size sports bra as these allow you to change the chest and cup size independently.

XS, S, M, L, XL sizing assumes that as your cup size increases your chest size increases too, however this is not always the case.

If you have an unusual breast shape you can either look for a sports bra with more stretch or one with more adjustment.

### Always Remember

Across brand makes there are different sizes, styles and colours. Whilst it means there is a solution for everyone, it makes finding your perfect fit harder.

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#### About the Author

The Sports Bra Fitting Guide is published by England Rugby. It is based on material written by **Professor Joanna Wakefield-Scurr**, PhD., aka 'The Bra Professor', Head of the Research Group in Breast Health, University of Portsmouth. With a valued contribution from Dr Nicola Brown, St Mary's University, Twickenham, London.

