**Bra Specifications**

You might not expect there to be a lot of selection when it comes to undergarments, but bras have a lot of variation. Bras come in a multitude of styles, materials and sizes. A bra should be chosen based on the wearer’s needs and personal preference. In this paper, I will discuss the materials used to construct a bra, the various styles, and how bra sizing works.

**Materials**

The material of a bra can be chosen depending on what purpose the bra needs to serve. Bras are often made of cotton, polyester or a mixture of “natural and synthetic” materials [1] because they are comfortable. Lace can be added to enhance the appearance and foam can be added for padding. Bras for athletics will be made of materials that wick fluids away from the body. Bras contain materials that provide elasticity, such as spandex, to keep the bra tight against the torso, as well as allow expansion and movement [1]. If underwire is present it is “made of metal, plastic, or resin” [2].Hooks, eyes, strap rings and adjusters are made of “plastic and nylon coated metal and stainless steel” [3]. Different styles of bras may be made of different materials to suit their purpose.

**Styles**

Bra styles are created with various purposes in mind. Whether it is to make the breasts appear a certain shape, to provide maximum support, or to remain unseen beneath different shapes of garments. Table 1 shows differences in straps, support, cups and purpose for some of the most popular bra styles. Most styles are available in a wide range of sizes.

**Sizes**

Going bra-less or wearing improperly-fitted bras can lead to numerous pains across a woman’s upper torso [2][4]. Bra sizes have a numeric value for the band size and a letter value for the cup size. The band size is determined by measuring around the wearer’s torso, just below the breasts [2]. Cup size is determined by measuring at the fullest part of the breasts and then comparing to the band size [5]. Because cup size is relative to band size the breasts that fill a 44D bra are larger than those that fill a 30D bra, even though the cup size is the same. If a bra is too big in the band the bra will ride up in the back [2][6]. If the cups are too big there will be a space between the bra cups and the breasts [4], or the cups will appear “wrinkly or baggy” [6]. On the other hand, if the cups are too small, the breasts will overflow the bra [4][6] or the underwire will dig into the ribcage [6]. If the band size is too small the shoulder straps will fall

Table 1. Styles of bras. A cell marked “Variable” indicates that the feature is not set for that specific style. [7] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\_of\_brassiere\_designs

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Straps** | **Support** | **Cups** | **Purpose** |
| Adhesive | None | Poor | Stick-on below breasts | Backless or strapless outerwear |
| Balconette | Variable | Reduced | Half-height | Dramatic uplift, cleavage |
| Bandeau | None | Poor | Band of cloth, compression | Small breasts, comfortable |
| Bralette | Thin/lacy [8] | Light-good [8] | Wireless, not molded [8] | Small breasts, training bra [8] |
| Bullet | Variable | Full | Paraboloid shaped | Late 1940’s style |
| Convertible | Re-arrangeable /  Removable | Variable | Variable | Straps can be rearranged to be hidden under different styles of garments |
| Demi-cup | Attached at outer edge | Reduced | Half-height to ¾ height, underwire | Uplift, cleavage, low-cut outer garments |
| Leisure | Wide | Poor | Shapeless | Relaxing / sleeping |
| Maternity | Wide | Full | Full | Reduce bounce |
| Minimizer | Variable | Variable | Compression | De-emphasize large breasts |
| Nursing | Wide | Full | Full, removable | Increased comfort, breast feeding |
| Plunge | “Set widely apart” | Variable | Angled low in the center, not heavily padded | Low cleavage, garments with plunging necklines |
| Push-up | Variable | Variable | Angled demi-cup | Pushes the breasts up and in for increased cleavage |
| Sports | Wide | Good | Shapeless, compression | Athletics, reduce breast bounce |
| Strapless | None | Good | Underwire, padded | Bare-shoulder garments |

off the shoulders, or there will be indents in the shoulders from the straps digging into them [6]. The most telling symptom of an ill-fitting bra is upper torso pain [2][4][6]. Furthermore, a woman’s breast size can change over time in response to weight gain/loss, medications, and pregnancy [4]. These changes may lead to well-fitting bras becoming ill-fitting bras.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, bras vary widely in size, style and materials. The style and materials of bras that a woman wears may change from day to day, even several times within a day. Wearing a bra that fits properly is important for preventing upper torso pain. Unfortunately, the size of bra that a woman wears will likely change multiple times over her lifetime. Overall, women choose bras to suit their purpose and own personal style, and one might argue that there is a bra to suit every woman’s tastes and needs.

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