

## Ban the bounce

You love to run. So let's get you a sports bra that can pass our high-intensity support test.

By SARA ANGLE



**W**We're going to level with you: Running is the mother of all unrelenting high-impact workouts. For starters, each foot strike sends a jolt equivalent to two to three times your body-weight right back through you in the form of something called ground reaction force. And when you consider that you're pounding the pavement some 150-plus times per minute, you can see how running is tougher on breasts than stop-and-start types of plyometric (a.k.a. jumping) exercise are. In fact, about one in three

female runners surveyed at the 2012 London Marathon reported that they had experienced breast pain. The good news? The right sports bra can reduce your bounce by as much as 74 percent.

Picture this: Your breasts don't just go up and down as you run. When unsupported, they each move an average of four inches in a butterfly pattern—up, down, side to side, and forward and backward. "With up to 4 percent of your total body weight in your breasts, that's a lot of demand

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on your natural support system," says Lajeane Lawson, Ph.D., an adjunct professor of exercise and sport science at Oregon State University, who has been researching breast health and sports bras for 38 years. It's a common myth that firming up your chest muscles can give breasts a lift and extra support. "Breast tissue lies on top of the pectoral muscle," Lawson says, which means that the breast itself has no muscle to give it structure. Instead, breasts are composed mostly of fat tissue (which surrounds tiny globular



## For short runs

Chafing and rubbing are less of a problem when you're at it for only a half hour or so, which is why most strap styles—especially racerback and crisscross—are fair game, says LaJean Lawson, Ph.D., a sports bra expert. (Also, C cups can get away with a compression style here.)



**For A and B cups**  
New Balance Metro Run Crop  
(\$46, newbalance.com).



**For C cups**  
Smartwool  
Seamless Racerback  
(\$60, smartwool.com).



**For D cups and larger**  
Freya Active  
Underwired Crop Top  
(\$62, figleaves.com).

milk glands) held up by elastic connectors called Cooper's ligaments. These thin band-like sheets tether the breast tissue to the pectorals and are meant to stretch and then bring back into shape when breasts are in motion. Minimize the bounce and you're sparing yourself some of that stretch. And the benefits go beyond stopping sag: Your breasts also contain tons of nerve endings, so you really feel the pressure and pain of a bumpy ride as you're striding.

To lighten the jolts, start from the ground up. Harvard researchers found that taking shorter, quicker strides can reduce the ground reaction force that is amplifying your bounce. The higher the cadence (the quickness with which your feet turn over), the less vertical lift-off you get, which translates to a softer impact. Running at a cadence of 170 to

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180 steps per minute (about five miles per hour for the average woman) or more is a good bet, says Irene S. Davis, Ph.D., the director of the Spaulding National Running Center at Harvard Medical School. "The shorter strides also encourage you to strike further forward on your foot, which provides better shock absorption at the knees and hips than when you strike with your heel," Davis explains.

Besides that, it's all about wearing a good sports bra. If achieving your foolproof fit has so far been elusive, just follow these expert tips to finally experience running nirvana.

## Find your ideal style

For smaller breasts (As and Bs), it's OK to go with sports bras labeled small, medium, or large. But if you're a full



C or larger, it's best to look for bras sized by both the cup and the band, Lawson says. Compression-style bras—pullovers that are not separated into cups—can work for up to a C, but if you're a D cup or larger, encapsulation bras, which have separate nonstretch cups, will give you more support, she says. Also, only runners who require a D cup or fuller really need to look for bras with an underwire. No matter what your size, skip V-neck styles. "When you're running, breasts actually rise more than they fall, so check that the front of the bra is high enough to hold you down," Lawson suggests.

### Do the strap test

Most of the weight of your breasts is actually held by the straps, Lawson says. "There should be more stability in the front of the strap, up to the peaks of the shoulder, and more give in the back," she advises. To test a prospective sports bra, grab the top of a strap in one hand and the bottom of the rib band directly below it in the other, and tug; do this both in the front and back of the bra. You're looking for less stretch in the front straps than in the back.

Also, the wider the straps, the more the force of your breasts will be spread out over the fabric, which reduces pressure and digging in. "This is especially important if you have larger breasts or are going on a longer run," Lawson explains. Meanwhile, the bottom rib band acts as the anchor of support; bands with hook-and-eye closures let you customize snugness even more.

### Try a test drive

"The goal is to be secure and comfortable, whatever it takes," Lawson says. That means jumping around in the fitting room to get a feel for the sports bra in action before deciding to buy it. When you bend, swing, or raise and lower your arms, the bottom rib band of the bra should not move. If it does, try a smaller band size.

Some companies, including L.L. Bean and Moving Comfort, even allow you to return a bra that you've run in if you're not happy with it. (Just wash it first if you need to return.) →

## If you're going long

Your goal is to minimize chafing, which frequently happens if you're running for more than an hour, Lawson says. Look for U-back or open-back styles (rather than racerbacks or ones with crisscrossing straps), which are less likely to rub against shoulder blades. Straps that are adjustable also let you reposition on the go if you feel any discomfort.

**For A and B cups**  
**Handful**  
**Adjustable Bra**  
(\$50 to \$54,  
handful.com).



**For C cups**  
**ASICS Adjust Bra**  
(\$42, asicsamerica.com).



**For D cups and larger**  
**Moving Comfort**  
**Maia** (\$58,  
brooksrunning.com).





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## For sprintervals

HIIT sessions are probably your sweatiest runs, so moisture management is the aim, Lawson says. Look for brands that tout sweat-wicking fabric (most sports bras have it these days) as well as mesh zones or holes for ventilation.

**For A and B cups**  
UA Armour Mid Breathe  
(\$35, [ua.com](http://ua.com)).



**For C cups**  
C9 Champion Power  
Shape High Support  
Sports Bra (\$23,  
[target.com/c9](http://target.com/c9)).

**For D cups and larger**  
CW-X Xtra Support III  
(\$50, [cw-x.com](http://cw-x.com)).



## A word about your bra's mileage

Washing and use will wear out the stretch and recovery of your sports bra, so pay attention to signs that it may be time to toss it. If you wear the same sports bra three or four times a week, you'll need to replace it in six to 12 months, Lawson says.

If it no longer feels secure, the back of the rib band is riding up higher than the front, or the straps are sliding down your shoulders, it's definitely time to go shopping. Wash your new bra in warm water, avoid detergent containing chlorine, and hang-dry instead of throwing it in the dryer. ★