



What lies beneath

Are bras as we know them a thing of the past?
Three lingerie experts weigh in...

It's often said that we dress to impress others which, if we're brutally honest, is sometimes the case. But lingerie? The pieces underneath our clothing are our little secret, and we've personally found that the lingerie we wear can give us a real boost of confidence as we go about our day. That said, with a diary that's been rendered obsolete since March, we've spent more days forgoing a bra in lockdown than ever before. While that might be a usual occurrence for some, for others, going braless in public doesn't come easy—even if BuzzFeed writer Tomi Obaro's 'I just don't see bras making a comeback after this' tweet received over 500,000 eagerly-agreeing likes. We get it, the thought of returning to underwires, constricting fabrics, and strap marks doesn't fill us with joy, but is the bra well and truly on the way out? Have we been lingerie liberated in lockdown? With the average UK bra size sitting at a 36DD, can those with bigger busts be converted? Nay, should they be? Before you decide to #freethenipple forever, we spoke with several experts who each have something to add in the bra debate.

THE OSTEOPATH

'Bras are designed to support the weight and structure of the breast,' says Amanda Burnham, one of Scotland's top osteopaths and founder of AB Osteopathy. 'A D-cup breast can weigh around a kilo, so going without a bra can result in slouching and slumping, simply due to the weight of the unsupported breasts. Continued hunching over can affect back muscles, chest muscles, and even the head carriage, which can cause musculoskeletal pain, headaches, and even tension in the jaw, particularly if sitting at a desk all day.' Amanda stresses, however, that her main concern is ill-fitting underwear, as opposed to no underwear at all. 'Many of my clients experience tension and pain in the strap area. Bras that are too small can restrict the rib cage, cause pressure, and affect the mechanics of breathing. Similarly, bras that are too big can pull the shoulders forward, affecting the chest muscles, which can potentially lead to adaptations in posture and functionality. Going braless occasionally can help ease this pain temporarily, but you need to be certain doing so won't be detrimental in the long term.'

THE BRA FITTER

'So many women avoid having a proper bra fitting because they're busy, embarrassed, or don't know where to start,' reveals bra-fitter extraordinaire, Sarah Connoley. 'This is why many find virtual bra fitting appointments to be handy. During an appointment, I can work out your size and give personalised guidance to optimise your comfort and confidence, without you having to leave home. I really believe that, when fitted properly, all bras should be wearable—not constricting.'

As with everything in life, a little bit of variety is good when it comes to lingerie. We all have a bra we turn to for comfort, and if there's one piece of lingerie we've all come to rely on lately, it's the bralette. Sadly, a bralette won't work for everyone (and sports bras aren't entirely inspiring) but with comfort high on the agenda for the foreseeable, many women are searching for ways to encompass form and function. Sarah recommends everyone invest in a super smooth t-shirt bra to have the best of both worlds. 'A t-shirt bra is a staple – even in my wardrobe – and having a couple of go-to options to slip into is essential to making mornings more manageable. Nothing feels more awkward than getting dressed and realising your bra is showing through your shirt—unless that was your intent! There is something to be said for wearing fanciful lingerie, too. My clients feel pretty, powerful, and pulled-together when they wear a beautiful bra. And feeling more confident should be everyone's main priority, regardless of their bra preference.' We couldn't agree more.

THE SURGEON

Cooper's ligaments are bands of tough, fibrous, flexible connective tissue that shape and support the breasts. These ligaments maintain the shape and structure and help to prevent sagging. While it's natural and expected that Cooper's ligaments will stretch over time, due to pregnancy, genetics, weight fluctuation, smoking, and age, some experts also believe going a long time without any support can potentially stretch Cooper's ligaments, too.

'If you're relaxing at home, I don't think there's any real evidence to show that going braless will cause you long-term harm,' explains Chris Cartlidge, a consultant oncoplastic and cosmetic breast surgeon at Dr Nestor's Medical and Cosmetic Centre. 'However, for those with larger breasts, the weight of them can lead to back, neck, and shoulder pain, and I would always recommend wearing a supportive, non-underwired bra when undertaking any activity. All women should consider a sports bra or similar support if they're doing anything active as the aggressive movement of the breasts can cause pain and bruising. In the worst cases, you might develop fat necrosis where an area of breast tissue that has been traumatised can die off and become firm and lumpy.'

Please see your doctor if you find any lumps or changes to your breasts.

THE BRAS THAT SHAPED ME

Hood's editor, Maxine Eggenberger, has worn a bra since the age of 10. Now, a 32G, she reveals the bras that she's come to rely on over the years.



While I'll never feel confident enough to completely forgo a bra, Scandi brand Lindex creates the only bralettes that provide my bust with the support I need to feel confident.
Bralette, £14.99, Lindex



After years of shying away from strapless dresses, I discovered Wonderbra's brilliant bra. The hold is nothing short of incredible and it's significantly broadened my outfit horizons.
Strapless bra, £42, Wonderbra at Next



Rosie Huntington-Whiteley's lingerie collection for Marks & Spencer paved the way for pretty, fuller-bust bras, and for that I'll be forever thankful.
Non-padded bra (B-G), £25, Rosie for Marks & Spencer

Having bigger boobs has always provided me with the perfect excuse to avoid exercising, but no more, thanks to this sports bra with unrivalled support.
Sports bra, £35, Sweaty Betty