

# Look better dressed

What you wear under your clothes is just as important (maybe even more!) as what you wear on the outside

A great outfit starts with great lingerie. (They don't call them "foundation garments" for nothing!) Even a fabulously gorgeous dress can look cheap if you've got visible panty lines or bumps and bulges showing through, or if you're spilling out of your bra in every direction. Needless to say, a bad underwear day can also put you in a bad mood.

In our new national ShopSmart underwear poll, more than one in four women said that wearing ill-fitting or unattractive underwear has affected their state of mind. And almost half of the women we surveyed said that nice undies can make them feel sexier or more confident.

Here we take a close look at undergarments—bras, panties, and shapewear—to help you find the best ones for your body. The first rule: Get the right fit. Turn the page for expert fit tips. Rule No. 2: If you're going to spring for shapewear—Spanx can run more than \$100—buy the right one. As we found when

we put four shapewear products to the test, what you choose can make a huge difference, not just in terms of comfort but also in how good it makes you look in your clothes. So if you've already tried Spanx or another brand and sworn you'd never squeeze yourself into one of those contraptions ever again, turn to page 40.

For our first-ever shapewear test, we recruited four brave staffers to try on shapers under a favorite dress that they didn't quite have the confidence to wear. We asked the women to wear them as they would for a special occasion—for 4 hours at a time, unless they got so uncomfortable they couldn't take it anymore. None of our staffers had to peel the garments off early. But they had some definite preferences—and no, spending more doesn't get you a better garment.

Also, don't miss our list of great lingerie websites on page 42, especially if you're like most women, according to our surveys, and don't try on bras or underwear before you buy them.

PHOTO: ALEXANDRA GRABLEWSKI; PROP AND FASHION STYLING: KIM FIELD







# Get the right fit

## Tips on choosing bras, panties, and shapers

The right underpinnings can take you from frumpy to fabulous, but it's not easy to find great-fitting bras, panties, and shapewear. In the panty department alone, 55 percent of American women say they have difficulty finding a comfortable style, and almost one-third have a tough time figuring out their correct size, according to our survey. We turned to Lisa Cole, founder of LingerieFitExpert.com, and Jill Staats, the fit pro who helped with our makeovers on page 40, for advice that will put the "voom" back in your va-va-voom.

### Bras

Wearing the wrong-size bra can not only make you appear heavier than you are but can also throw off your posture. A professional fitting is the best way to find the perfect bra, but there are some telltale fit signs to heed: If your breasts are spilling over, and if the band is uncomfortably tight or leaving indentations on your rib cage or shoulder blades, your bra is too small. It's too big if it hikes up in the back (you probably need to go down a band size) or you have gapping in your cups (try on a smaller cup size). "When a bra fits, you should only touch it when you get dressed in the morning; you shouldn't have to battle with it all day," Cole says.

### Panties

Cole tells clients to look for the Three C's: covered, concealed, and confident. If your panties are creeping up and creating a wedgie, or if they're digging into your cheeks or waist, they're too tight. Go down a size if they look bulky through your clothes. "You want to put on underwear as you would a pair of gloves," Cole says. "They should glide on and fit like a second skin."

### Shapewear

The right shapewear should decrease the measurement in your targeted area by at least half an inch. The key: Read the size chart and pick the size that corresponds to your actual measurements, not the ones you're hoping to achieve. If your skin is spilling over the edges of the garment, it's too small. You'll know it's too big if it creases, bags, or rolls. "If you're wearing the correct size, it should feel like a pair of firm-fitting underwear," Cole says. "You should be comfortable; the days of wearing a sausage suit are over." But don't be surprised if the garment looks tiny when you pull it out of the package, Staats says. When wearing a high-top, mid-thigh shaper like the ones we used in our makeovers, she adds, be sure the top of the shaper meets the bottom of your bra; otherwise, you'll get a bulge in between.

ILLUSTRATIONS: KRISTEN ULVE; PHOTO: ALEXANDRA GRABLEWSKI; PROP AND FASHION STYLING: KIM FIELD

## We put shapewear to the test

Spanx is the big name in shapewear, so we tried out two of its garments—one high-priced and one midpriced—plus a super-cheap Target version and an infomercial product. Do you really get what you pay for? Read our shapewear makeovers on the next pages and see for yourself. But first, check out the four shapers we tried out, below. Included in our rundowns is info on how they fared in our wash tests. We had our fabric expert, Pat Slaven, launder each

garment three times according to instructions and give each one a close look to see how well it was made. Then we had fit expert Jill Staats, who's a pattern maker for Eileen Fisher, measure and evaluate the women in their dresses, first in their regular undies and then in each shaper. It turns out that the one with the biggest price tag wasn't the big winner. And the infomercial product, which claims to "instantly take off inches," was a total bust.

**Spanx Hide & Sleek Hi-Rise Body Smoother**  
(shown on page 37)  
**Price** \$68

**Features** High-waist, mid-thigh style. Comes in nude and black, in sizes small to 3X (plus sizes are \$72).

**How it held up** This product looks the sturdiest and has the sturdiest construction, with smooth, flat-sewn seams. After repeated machine-washing, it still looked like new. But because it's thicker and heavier, it's likely to be warmer to wear.

**Where to get it** Department stores, Spanx.com

### the winner

**Spanx In-Power Line Super Higher Power**  
**Price** \$38

**Features** High-waist, mid-thigh style. Comes in nude, black, and cocoa, in sizes A to G (comparable on size chart with sizes small through 3X). It's the only one we tried that has a flap in the crotch so that you don't have to take it off to go to the bathroom.

**How it held up** It held up to hand-washing, but the leg hems are a single piece of yarn and could rip or run.

**Where to get it** Department stores, Spanx.com

**Assets by Sara Blakely Womens Sensational Shaper**  
**Price** \$20

**Features** Sara Blakely is the mastermind behind Spanx; this is her lower-priced line for Target. High-waist, mid-thigh style. This one comes only in nude, in sizes 1 to 5, and claims to fit women from 4'10" and 95 pounds to 6' and 300 pounds.

**How it held up** The seams are sewn from a single piece of yarn, so they could snag and unravel. But this shaper held up fine to hand-washing.

**Where to get it** Target, Target.com

### the loser

**Kymaro New Body Shaper**  
**Price** \$40 (for 2 pieces, plus S&H)

**Features** This infomercial product comes in nude and black, in sizes 1 to 6, and claims to fit women from 4'10" and 95 pounds to 6' and 300 pounds. It's a high-backed top with straps and comes with "free" bottoms for an additional \$9.95 S&H.

**How it held up** Its thick fabric handled machine-washing, but the bottoms had a weird smell when new and after washing.

**Where to get it** Kymaro.com; Bed, Bath & Beyond



## UNDERWEAR UNCOVERED Some highlights in the history of lingerie



**1400s**

Corsets are worn by wealthy Europeans.

Wearing corsets becomes widespread among "upper classes" and is seen as a symbol of position, rank, and wealth.

**1500s-1800s**

The first bra patent is awarded to a New York socialite.

**1914**

Flappers make boyish silhouettes popular, and thin elastic girdles replace the corset. Girdles are no longer a status symbol and are worn every day.

**1920s**

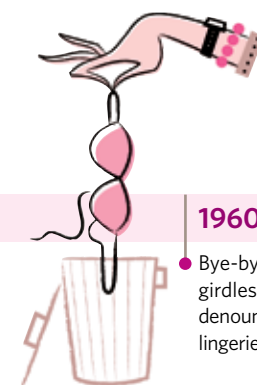
**1950s**

The hourglass figure is in; women begin wearing the all-in-one corselet, a bra/girdle/garter combo.



**1967**

Playtex introduces its 18 Hour Girdle, which is supposed to be comfy enough to wear all day.



**1960s**

Bye-bye, bras and girdles! Feminists denounce traditional lingerie.



**1964**

The push-up Wonderbra is developed (its popularity peaks in the 1990s).

**1990**

Madonna popularizes wearing corsets and other underwear as outerwear.



**2000**

Spanx shapewear debuts. Sales go through the roof after Oprah places the Footless Body-Shaping pantyhose on her "favorite things" list.

**2010**

Spanx gets lots of competition; shapewear sales top out at more than \$800 million.\*

\*According to Mintel, a global research firm.

**“I feel more slender,  
like it’s holding me in.”**

—Elena, 29; e-mail marketing associate

**“This one was hard to put  
on, but it was worth it!”**

—Jamie, 34; associate editor, health

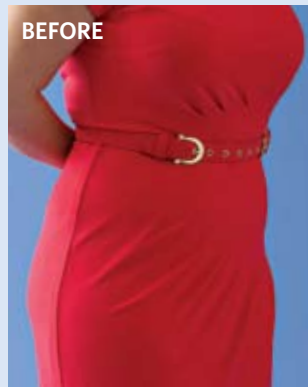


**The problem** I have visible panty lines.

**THE BEST SOLUTION** \$38 Spanx

“I want to look amazing in this dress!” Elena told us when she volunteered for our test. And her favorite Spanx garment, the midpriced model, definitely made her feel more amazing, in her dress and in skinny jeans. When our fit pro measured her, Elena was thrilled to learn that the garment took a full inch off her rib cage, tummy area, and thigh—without creating bulges elsewhere as the other three garments did, especially at the top of the thigh. Elena is 4’11” and the material bunched at the top of her leg, creating a bulge. As our fit pro points out, “The stuff has got to go somewhere!” The most flattering garments held “the stuff” inside the fabric. Elena wore Spanx to her anniversary dinner and said

afterward, “I enjoyed myself rather than worrying about the battle of the bulge!” Her least favorite was the Kymaro. She said it made her feel like a sausage, and the too-long bottoms showed under the hem of her dress. Even worse, she almost got stuck in it; her husband had to help her out!



BEFORE

AFTER

**The problem** I bought this dress 10 pounds ago.

**THE BEST SOLUTION** \$38 Spanx

For the “before” photos, we asked our volunteers to let it all hang out, and even size-4 Jamie showed some bulges under her thin cotton dress. “It looked cuter when I was 10 pounds thinner,” she confessed. Her fave shaper was also the midpriced Spanx. It slimmed Jamie a half-inch at her rib cage, hips, and thigh, and a full inch at her tummy. “I think it’s working,” she said.

“I feel smaller!” Our fit pro agreed. Jamie was especially fond of what she called the “magic trapdoor,” a flap in the crotch that lets you pee without taking off the garment—a real plus because this one was the tightest and therefore the trickiest to get into and out of. Jamie thought the more expensive Spanx wasn’t cinching enough, the Assets spread out her rear end, and the Kymaro was “a torture device.”



BEFORE



**“I haven’t worn this dress yet,  
but now I’ll find a place!”**

—Barbara, 50ish; associate director, customer database infrastructure

**“I don’t want to have to hold  
in my stomach all day.”**

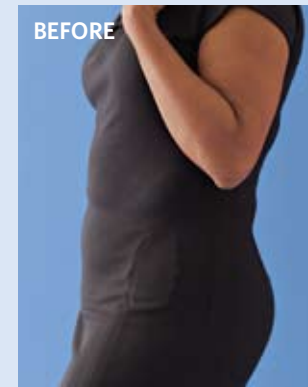
—Dawn, 45; senior editorial associate/researcher

**The problem** I’m too self-conscious to wear this dress in public.

**THE BEST SOLUTION** \$20 Assets

The midpriced Spanx garment that looked so great on the other women looked great on Dawn, too—except that it had a prominent seam that showed through her formfitting dress, so it was a no-go. But the cheaper Assets shaper made her look slimmer and sleeker,

as did the higher-priced Spanx. While Dawn liked the silky feel of the \$68 Spanx, the \$20 Assets garment was a bit more slimming—a no-brainer. “She looks smooth all over, and her tush looks really good!” our fit pro said. As for the Kymaro, it was also a bust on Dawn. In fact, it created more lines and bumps than it eliminated, and she found it so uncomfortable that she wanted to peel it off before her 4-hour test period was over. “I’ve had this dress for over a year, but I could never wear it without feeling like I had to suck everything in,” Dawn said. Before we took her “after” picture, she cut the tags out. Now her dress is ready to wear and she can’t wait to put it on again!



BEFORE

**The problem** I’d like to look slimmer through my midsection.

**THE BEST SOLUTION** \$38 Spanx

Barbara bought this hot red dress when she was out shopping for casual clothes. “It just called to me!” she said. She hasn’t worn it yet, but she’s eager to find an occasion. “This looks fabulous,” our fashion pro said of Barbara in the \$38 Spanx. “Instead of trying to smush everything in, it smooths it all out but keeps her curves.” When we measured Barbara, she was a half-inch smaller from

rib cage to thigh and everywhere in between. She said she felt “less hold” with the \$68 Spanx and the cheaper Assets, and the Kymaro created rolls of back fat that Barbara didn’t have. Plus it was really uncomfortable—though she says she would be willing to put up with a little bit of a tight feeling to look better in her clothes. “It’s like Billy Crystal said,” she told us, “It’s better to look good than to feel good!”



BEFORE

PHOTOS: ALEXANDRA GRABLEWSKI; HAIR: TONYA NOLAND & ROBERT HUITRON FOR MARKEDWARDINC.COM; MAKEUP: NOELLE MARINELLI AND JULES WALDKOETTER



# Great undie sites

## Where to shop online

Walk-in stores don't always have your size or the color you're looking for, but odds are you can find it online. The sites below even have hard-to-fit sizes. And they make it easy to sort by cup, style, or brand. Buying online is best for stocking up on brands you already know and love. But if you're brave enough to try something new, all of these sites allow returns. Plus each meets our requirements for privacy, contact-info disclosure, and customer service.

### BareNecessities.com

In addition to its enormous selection of bras and panties—it's like a lingerie superstore—this site has a robust collection of shapewear for every body. Shop by brand, style (everything from leggings to arm slimmers, plus all the usual tops and bottoms), and problem areas (think waist and rear). Each item listing includes a size chart and level of control, and the "We Recommend" area makes it easy to find coordinating items. **Shipping** Starts at \$5; free for orders \$50-plus **Returns** 60 days from receipt; credit after

### TheLittleFlirt.com

As the online home of celeb-favorite lingerie shop La Petite Coquette, this is the go-to site for sexy little nothings, whether you're looking for bra and panty sets, sensuous sleepwear, or hot hosiery. We fell in love with the Blush Lingerie Secret Lies Underwire Padded Chemise with G-String, \$68. See the "Promos & Coupons" page for the latest deals. **Shipping** \$10 flat rate; free for orders \$100-plus **Returns** 30 days from order

### FigLeaves.com

This site offers beautiful underpinnings



beyond the typical boring nude bras and sensible panties. And the wide range of bra sizes (from 28AA to 52DDD/E) means there's something to fit every figure. The Freya Colette Underwired Plunge Balcony Bra caters to large busts, in sizes 28D through 38G, \$66.

**Shipping** \$4.95 flat rate **Returns** Must be in their possession within 20 days of receipt

### Nordstrom.com

Go to the walk-in department store for bra fittings and use the site for ordering more. Nordstrom.com makes it easy to find what you want among its extensive

collection. You can sort by type of item, style, mood, color, price, and brand. We especially love the "Flattering Basics" section (one of the "moods") for pieces you'll want to wear every day, like the Wacoal Delicate Notion Full Fit Underwire Bra, 35 percent off at \$37.90.

**Shipping** \$8 flat rate; free for orders \$200-plus **Returns** Unlimited

### OneStopPlus.com

From bras to loungewear to hosiery, this site carries a huge range of sizes, including bras from 34B to 58J and women's sizes 12W to 44W. Price, size, color, brand, and customer-rating filters make it easy to find what you're looking for. Don't miss the Bra Fit Guide, which includes tips on "side spillage" and straps that dig in. The OSP Shopper's Club (\$19/year) offers \$2.99 shipping, special deals, and early sale access.

**Shipping** Starts at \$5.99 **Returns** 90 days from receipt for refunds; credit after

### EvloveIntimates.com

While the collection of ready-made items is great, the real star of the show is the design shop, where you can customize bralets (an unlined, soft-cup bra, almost like a cropped camisole), panties, and camis with your choice of style, color, fabric, trim, and bows. Subscribe to the newsletter for special savings.

**Shipping** \$5 flat rate; free for orders \$200-plus **Returns** None for custom pieces; 14 days from purchase for ready-made items

## Other great places to shop

**HERROOM.COM** has a huge selection of pretty maternity and nursing lingerie.

**HIPSANDCURVES.COM** sells sexy pieces in lots of different styles in plus sizes.

**ABOUTTHEGIRL.CO.UK** stocks gorgeous lingerie made for women who have had mastectomies.

# In our drawers

We asked 1,000 women for some of their underwear secrets. Here's what they shared.



56% of women fold their underwear; 27% just toss it in the drawer.

### WHAT COLOR IS YOUR FAVORITE PAIR OF PANTIES?

29% white  
21% black  
15% beige or nude  
9% pink

8% a print  
5% blue  
4% purple  
2% red  
1% green



### Intimate confessions

- 10% of women admit to sometimes going commando in public. (A previous poll revealed that women are more likely to go braless—19%.)
- 25% of women own at least one pair of underwear they'd be embarrassed for someone else to see.
- Only 8% said they try on underwear before they buy a new brand or type.

**Biggest complaint** wedgies

**Biggest underwear offense** thong or panties that stick out

53% have bought a body shaper but ...  
84% gave it the thumbs-down, mostly because it's uncomfortable.  
24% said it didn't fulfill its claims.  
20% said they never wear it.

Women own 21 pairs of underwear, on average; 1 in 10 owns 35 pairs or more.