

Golden girls

It's time to show your breasts some respect with these sports bra buying must-dos. *by* CHERYL LOCK

Sure, a flattering sports bra will give you a solid confidence boost, but did you know it may also make for a safer workout? Consider a study from the University of Portsmouth in England that found women who ran without a bra literally hit the ground with more force (potentially upping

their chance of injury) than those who wore one with proper support. What's more, a well-fitting sports bra reduces the excess movement that can lead to breast, back and neck pain. Get your girls under control and make sure you're sporting the right bra with these four uplifting rules.

RULE 1

Read the hang tag

High quality bras will indicate on the hang tag if they're appropriate for low- (yoga), medium- (hiking) or high-impact (running) activities. If you're a D cup or larger, pick a high-impact bra with a back clasp regardless of your routine. The exception: A no-clasp bra may be more comfortable for floor workouts like Pilates.

Wash it! Preferably by hand with a mild detergent every one to three wears.

genius!

RULE 2

Test for strength

For comfort, choose a bra with straps at least 1-inch wide. The bra's material should be sturdier than your everyday bra, especially in the underband (the strip beneath the cups), which provides up to 80 percent of breast support. Even with a strong tug, the fabric should barely give.

RULE 3

Cover up

Breasts move in a figure-8 motion, not just up and down. If you're a C cup or larger, buy a bra with separate molded cups, which provide maximum support. While it may be flattering to show a little cleavage, a full-coverage style ensures that the tissue at the top of the breast is also fully supported, preventing unnecessary soreness.

RULE 4

Perform checkups

If you've lost weight, examine your bra: An underband that's too loose or cup sizes that are too big can cause extra jiggle, potentially stretching the delicate breast tissue and setting you up for sagging. Even if your weight stays the same, replace bras after one year or when they start to lose shape and elasticity to make sure they're doing their job.

BREAST IN SHOW

Our pick: Kelly C/D bra, \$60, skirtsports.com.