

Some transgender, gender diverse, or non-binary people may prefer a flat chest and will choose to bind their chest. This handout is provided to help you understand the benefits and risks, how to safely bind your chest to protect your body, and how to prevent or minimize side effects of chest binding.

What is chest binding?

- The practice of flattening and minimizing the appearance of breasts by pushing the tissue of your breasts down and out towards your armpits. This will make your chest appear flatter.

Why bind your chest?

- This is a gender-affirming practice that can help reduce gender dysphoria and help a person feel more at ease in their body.
- It can help you feel more confident, safer, and at ease in public.
- Some studies show that chest binding can have large mental health benefits. One study showed that roughly 70% of transgender people in the survey reported a positive mood after they started binding.

What is a chest binder?

- It is a piece of clothing designed for the purpose of flattening a chest. Using a chest binder is the safest and most common way to bind.
- They come in different styles and sizes. The style you choose depends on your preference and comfort.
- Commercial chest binders are designed for compression and safety.
- There are other ways to bind your chest (wearing multiple sports bras, using tape or bandages) but these can cause serious health problems. It is important to talk with your doctor or other health care provider before binding your chest (more about risks and safety later).

What is the right size for a binder?

- Getting the right size of your binder is very important. Do not attempt to buy a binder that is too small. This may cause health issues and is not recommended.
- You will need to measure your chest and shoulders to know what the right size is for your body. Having someone help you take the measurements will make it easier and more accurate.
- Most online companies that sell binders have detailed instructions about how to measure and pick the right size based on your measurements.

How long can a binder be worn?

- It is recommended to only wear a binder for 8 to 10 hours a day. If you are at work or school for longer than 8 to 10 hours, it is important to take it off for a few minutes during the day and take several deep breaths.
- Do not sleep in your binder.
- Give yourself a one day a week break from wearing your binder. If you experience gender dysphoria when not wearing a binder, try to choose a time when you are alone or when you can wear comfortable clothing that covers your chest.

How do I care for my binder?

- Binders should be handwashed and air-dried every 3-4 uses. Avoid using hot water and do not put it in the dryer. The heat can ruin the elastic.
- Washing frequently can help prevent it from causing rashes or itching. You may want to have more than one, so you have one to wear when your other is being washed and dried.
- When you are not wearing your binder, hang it on a hanger to help it hold its shape.

Can I swim or exercise in a binder?

- It is recommended to wear a binder one size larger when exercising and starting with low intensity exercises first. If you experience any chest pain or discomfort, stop exercising and remove your binder.
- There are some companies that make binders for swimming. See the “Where to buy a binder?” section for details.

What are the risks of chest binding?

As with any intervention, there are risks and side effects. Following sizing and fitting guidelines and length of wear guidelines, will help prevent and minimize side effects. Some of the risks and side effects are:

- **Skin and tissue issues:**
 - You may experience acne, rashes, itching, swelling, or tenderness with wearing a binder. You can minimize this risk by buying a binder that is made of breathable material, by following the instructions on how to wash your binder, and by wearing it for no more than 8-10 hours a day with a binder-free day once a week.
 - If you remove your binder and notice redness or bleeding around the edges, it may be too tight.
 - You can wear a thin cotton undershirt under your binder to prevent skin irritation or a light dusting of unscented baby powder to absorb sweat.

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- **Pain**
 - You may experience pain in your chest, shoulders, back and/or abdomen. This is because your breasts are full of nerves and squeezing them can cause you pain. Following the recommendations for sizing and how long you wear it can help reduce the pain.
- **Shortness of breath**
 - Having something tight around your chest can make it difficult to breathe. This is more common if you are overweight or have large breasts.
- **Other risks**
 - You may also experience other side effects like dizziness, lightheadedness, problems with digestion or heartburn, or overheating. If you experience these, do not wear your binder anymore and talk with your doctor. The binder may not fit well. Following fitting instructions and length of wear guidelines will help prevent these side effects.

What if I have a large chest?

- You may need to adjust things throughout the day for comfort. Some people like to push their breasts “down and out” while others like to push them “up and out”. Try different methods to find out what is best for you.
- If you are experiencing any side effects, you may want to shorten the length of time you bind or take breaks throughout the day.

Where do I find a binder?

- **Gc2b Transitional Apparel:** An online shop featuring an assortment of chest binders and a sizing guide to help correctly find the right fit. <https://www.gc2b.co/>
- **Spectrum Outfitters:** An online shop featuring chest binders and other gender expression clothing. <https://spectrumoutfitters.co.uk/>
- **Point of Pride:** Provides free chest binders to any trans person who needs one and cannot afford or safely obtain one. <https://www.pointofpride.org/free-chest-binders>
- **Underworks:** Binders in a variety of styles including binders for exercising. <https://www.underworks.com/tri-top-chest-binder>
- **Double design:** A variety of binders that include zip front, Velcro, full length, half length, and swim binders. <https://mydoubledesign.com/chest-binders-styles/>
- **Shebop:** Two stores in Portland that sell gender expression items. The stores are for ages 18 and over but will take appointments for those younger than 18. Make an appointment by emailing: info@sheboptheshop.com
- **The Pencil Test:** A lingerie and bra shop in Portland, OR or Renton, WA that is trans-friendly. They will fit you for a binder. <https://www.thepenciltest.com/>

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