

Expert Advice on Maternity & Nursing Bra Fitting

What's happening to my bust?

by Leigh Martin (Maternity and Nursing Specialist Bra fitter)

They're changing every day, they're sore, and your partner seems to find them irresistible. What's going on?

How do breasts change during pregnancy?

Your breasts are made up of fatty tissue, connective tissues and glands, enclosed in skin. During your pregnancy, the mammary glands expand and fluid is stored in the tissue.

Each breast will become 300-500g heavier (it's like having a pair of chicken breasts tucked in each bra cup!). As you can imagine, this puts the surrounding skin and tissue under a lot of strain. Your rib cage will expand slightly and your bra size may increase by 1-2 sizes – 34B to 38D isn't unusual. While your partner may appreciate this, it isn't without its problems.

A couple of days after your baby is born, you will notice your cup size grow again – that's your milk arriving. This is often associated with tenderness or soreness. But while your cup size is growing, the measurement around your rib cage will slowly return to normal.

What do I need to do?

If your breasts aren't adequately supported during pregnancy, they can lose their perky shape. They may also cause tension in your neck and back, but there's a solution to this: find a good set of maternity bras. After baby is born, you'll need to handle your breasts with utmost care to avoid mastitis. A good nursing bra will support them during this period.

What sort of maternity bra should I buy?

A soft bra is usually best, as underwired bras can cause restriction and cut in as you grow. There are design features in maternity bras that help keep your breasts in good shape:

- Soft breathable materials that expand with you and don't cut into the skin.
- An integrated support system
- Wider straps to ease the strain on shoulders and neck

If you're used to underwired bras, you'll be pleased to hear that there are underwired bras designed for wear during pregnancy and breastfeeding – they're designed specially for your changing shape, with soft wires. Don't forget that these are not interchangeable with normal underwired bras.

Most bras are now designed with nursing clips, so that you can use them after the baby is born too; but because your breasts continue to change shape, you'll probably find you need at least one new bra (see nursing bras).

What sort of nursing bra should I buy?

After the baby is born, you will notice your bra fastenings getting looser as your ribcage shrinks, but your breasts will almost certainly be spilling over the cups.

You might be able to continue with your maternity bras if they have nursing clips, but you will probably need a larger nursing bra to see you through the first 5-6 weeks of nursing.

Customers in the FHTM boutique usually become big fans of the Bravado bra – even if the soft style initially put them off. Women often come back and buy two or three more to keep them going. The moral of the tale? Try a soft bra, and see what a difference it makes.

Maternity Bra Fitting Checklist

When you receive or choose your new bra, check that you can tick all of the following:

- Does it fasten comfortably on the tightest fitting hooks?

- Does it have at least ½-1 cup's worth of growing room (there's a handy way to check this: pop your hand half way in the cup: does it still stretch to fit)??

- Does it feel comfortable and give medium support??

- Does it stay where it is when you lift your arms??

- Does the underbust band stay firmly beneath your breast??

- Does it give your bust a natural shape??

Nursing Bra Fitting Checklist?

You can try on nursing bras from about 37 weeks. Check that you can answer yes to all of the following:?

- Does it fit comfortably on the loosest hooks (widest setting)??

- Does it have at least ½-1 cup's worth of growing room (pop your hand half way in the cup: does it still stretch to fit)??

- Does it feel comfortable and give soft gentle support??

- Does it stay put when you lift your arms??

- Does the underbust band stay firmly beneath your breast??

