



Tight Bra Syndrome

Or, why you might want to skip the underwire and take your bra off when you get home.

This may seem to be just of interest to women. However, as far as I know, many men are quite fond of breasts and the women who have them. So if you are a man reading this and there are breasts in this world that are special to you, please read on.

There was a study done in 1991 by researchers at Harvard, published in the European Journal of Cancer, which found that bra-free women had half the incidence of breast cancer of bra wearing women (Eur J Cancer. 1991;27(2):131-5). I write to bring awareness to health options and inspire wellness. When disease is present, there are probably many contributing factors or vibrations. The goal here is to support healthy women in their wellness and vitality and to encourage us all to embrace a softer, more gentle standard for ourselves.

The healthiest breasts are, yes, those National Geographic breasts. And no, I am not suggesting you to run around jiggling and topless for the health of your breasts.

And who is bra-free? Not American women anymore. An increase in breast cancer around the world can be linked to an increase in "Western" fashion, which includes bras. As cultures become more Western in their ways, breast cancer rates increase. I use these statistics, because they are available and widely published. The numbers of women who experience fibrotic breast tissue, pain, swelling, tenderness would be as good a measure of the problem with bras. And frankly, these are even more common, and even less documented.

Why is this? What is happening? What is it about bras that could have an effect on breast cancer rates? While there are no complete studies and a lot of opinions; there is plenty of good information that makes sense to me. Breasts have a great deal of lymphatic tissue in them and no muscles. They rely on the movements of the body to stimulate the lymphatic system, which removes wastes and toxins from the breasts.

In addition to being the home of the immune system; the lymphatic system is essentially a cleaning system for the body. I liken it to a low power pressure washer - when the system is able to flow well it will clean out all the nooks and crannies (interstitial spaces), leaving space for healthy nutrients and oxygen to bathe the cells of the body. When it isn't flowing well, our cells are floating around in a soup of cellular waste, toxins, cell debris, and potentially cancerous cells -- more junk than is healthy. You wouldn't take a bath in a tub filled with dirty dish water. That is an equivalent to what our cells are bathed in if lymphatic flow has been compromised.

How do we compromise the flow?

Constriction is often the culprit.

The challenge here is that our breasts are so dependant on the lymphatic system and the lymphatic system is so dependant on free movement (think National Geographic again). Instead of free movement here in America and now all over the world, a measure of beauty is propped up, firmly held breasts. Perhaps not as pointy as they were in 1961, but constricted they most certainly are.

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Are you home right now? Take your bra off!

So, how do you tell if you have Tight Bra Syndrome with the resulting constricted lymph flow? First, how do your breasts and the surrounding areas feel at the end of the day? If your breasts feel tight, compressed, aching to be free, your bra is probably too tight. If you can see red lines or indentations on your body where your bra was, your bra is probably too tight. Underwire bras can be the worst for this, because their design inherently draws a line of restriction right around the breast. The majority of fluid drainage from the breast is to the side of the body and up to the armpit, an area often compressed by any bra, most especially a underwire.

But Amelia, I am not going to start running around bra-less!!!

I know, of course you are not. We are well acculturated people, honestly I am too. We have grooming and dressing standards within our society and bras, for women, are standard. Consider these alternatives:

1. **Take your bra off when you get home.** Wear it for a maximum of 12 hours. You and your breasts, even larger ones, will get used to feeling free.
2. **Wear looser camisoles** with or without a shelf-bra when a more casual look is more appropriate.
3. **Please sleep bra-less.**
4. **Get yourself fitted properly.** Generally women wear a bra with a band (the number) size too small and the cup too big, which is essentially a bra that is too small. A larger band will give your breasts, and your lungs, room to breathe. Locally, Nordstroms has a great bra department, with many sizes, however you may need to go to an online specialty store such as LadyGrace.com to find more of a selection of non-underwire bras. Lane Bryant stores also have good supportive cotton bras for larger women and Victoria's Secret has a growing selection.
5. **Save the underwire for when it counts,** with your little black dress or your fabulous gown.
6. **Let your body move when your bra is off.** Sagging breasts have more to do with genetics and tissue health than whether or not they are squished up in a bra. If you don't believe me, have a lymphatic drainage breast treatment. These sessions move lymphatic fluid bringing health and resilience back into the tissue. You will probably note a visible difference in perkiness, texture, fullness and height after one session. (All technical terms)
7. **Use a natural crystal deodorant,** available at Whole Foods and other health food stores. Why? Your body doesn't need the perfumes and other ingredients in the mass market deodorants and anti-perspirants block the flow of perspiration. This is an important pathway for the body to remove waste and toxins. Do you want all of that squished back in your body? A natural deodorant may take some getting used to - and it is worth it, especially considering all the other challenges we have for breast health.

Breasts are a wonderful gift. They give women one of our super powers - breasts make milk! Let's take good care of them, be gentle and be accepting. Do yours really have to match the perky, airbrushed, constricted, airbrushed, 20 year-old, *airbrushed* breasts our culture has come to think all women should have?

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Amelia Mitchell, LMT is a nationally and state certified massage therapist with a private practice in Annapolis, MD. Using Therapeutic Massage and Lymph Drainage Therapy as developed by Bruno Chikly MD, DO of the Chickly Institute, Amelia supports her clients as they shift to enhanced wellness. She specializes in recovery from injuries, trauma and illness. Amelia brings her warm heart and a firm trust that we are all healthy and can feel better to each session.

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While Amelia does wear bras herself, she can't find that pretty black underwire one anywhere...