



SPECIAL REPORT

# BOOm & bust

## THE CHANGING SHAPE OF BRITISH WOMEN'S BREASTS

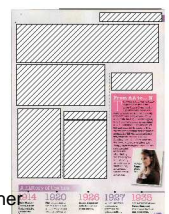
Over the years, women have had something of a love-hate relationship with their breasts. We flattened them in the 1920s, flaunted them in the 1950s and, in the 1970s, we let them all hang out. In the 21st century, you can buy the breasts you want with push-up bras, minimisers or surgery. But breast size is not all about trends; nature has a say in the matter, too. In the past decade, the average breast size in Britain has shot up from a pert 34B to a voluptuous 36C, with an estimated **40 per cent of us wearing a D cup and above.** Not only is the average breast size increasing each year – we Brits are now the most upfront women in Europe.

### Are bigger breasts best?

**While some men may welcome the news that Britain is the bust capital of Europe, Dr Marilyn Glenville, a nutritionist specialising in women's health and hormones, isn't so keen, citing obesity as one cause.** Today's woman is larger than her 1950s counterpart; since then, the average female waist size has increased from 27½in to 34in. And with waists, breasts have followed. 'But it's not all down to weight gain,' says Dr Glenville. 'We're now seeing young, slim girls with much larger breasts.' Jo Lee from Bravissimo, the UK company that specialises in underwear for larger-breasted women, has witnessed this trend first-hand. 'There is a misconception that it's unusual to be big-boobed and small-bodied. But we've been contacted by more than two million women since we started in 1995, the vast majority of whom are naturally small in the body and big in the bust.' So what's causing this cup-

size explosion? 'We have to look at what stimulates breast-tissue growth and that's oestrogen, the female sex hormone,' says Dr Glenville. 'Oestrogen changes our body shape during puberty, but we're being exposed to it constantly. Two thirds of the milk we consume comes from pregnant cows, meaning we absorb more oestrogen – and it's even in tap water.'

In 2002, research on English rivers by the Environment Agency found that a 'soup of oestrogen' – believed to have entered the rivers through the urine of Pill and HRT-users in sewage – was responsible for changing the sex of a third of male fish, and could be contaminating the water supply. HRT tops up depleting oestrogen levels in menopausal women, who – like women on the Pill – often go up a cup size or two when they begin treatment. 'We also have to look at the xenoestrogens (oestrogen-mimicking chemicals) present in deodorants and moisturisers,' warns Dr Glenville. 'My advice is to eat organic food as much as possible and go for the purest cosmetics you can find.'



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## Are your cups half full?

**Choosing the correct bra for your shape...** If your bra doesn't fit properly, it won't give you the support you need – and that applies whether you have large or small breasts. Make sure you're not one of the 80 per cent of British women wearing the wrong size, by checking the following when buying a bra:

● **If there are bulges over the cups** – what's been dubbed the

'double-boob effect' – your bra is too small or the straps are too tight.

● **If there are bulges underneath the bra**, it's definitely too small.

● **If your bra rides up your back**, it's not providing enough support for the weight of your breasts; try something with a deeper band around the body or a smaller back size.

'Get professionally fitted,' says

**Gemma Stone, lingerie buyer at John Lewis.**

'We're seeing a trend of customers with smaller backs and larger cup sizes, and this is usually down to the fact that women are being fitted correctly.'

### DELICATE WASH

'Ideally, you should wash your bra every time you wear it to regenerate elasticity, and replace it after a year to 18 months,' advises Julia Mercer, technical manager at Marks & Spencer. But don't worry if your laundry habits aren't up to scratch – a 2009 study by the laundry-products company Dr Beckmann found that the average woman washes her bras just once every two months!

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## SPECIALISED BRAS

**FOR SPORT:** 'We advise women to shop around and try on sports bras before buying one, and even jumping up and down to see how much the bra reduces movement,' says **Dr Joanna Scurr, who heads up the Research Group in Breast Health at the University of Portsmouth.**

'Our research found that wearing a sports bra while running reduced breast movement by a similar amount for AA-cup women and G-cup women (53 per cent and 55 per cent

respectively). If movement is not reduced, women risk damaging the fragile Cooper's ligaments (the breasts' connective tissue). Once these ligaments have been stretched, they will stay that way, causing sagging – so don't go running or do other impact exercise without a good sports bra.'

### AFTER A MASTECTOMY

**Gemma Stone from John Lewis advises:** 'Depending on the level of surgery you have undergone, you need to choose a bra with a high cotton content for comfort. Also, go for a back size that allows you to wear it slightly looser.'

## Working your assets

**M**arilyn Monroe was believed to sleep in her bra to keep her breasts perky, but does it work? 'No,' says Jonathan Staiano of Liberate Cosmetic Surgery. 'Wearing a bra in bed can give support and alleviate discomfort from large, heavy breasts, however it will have no effect on the shape or tone. A bra will only lift breasts while you have it on.'

'The breasts are composed of fat and connective tissue and, as such, there are no exercises that will have an impact on their size, shape or appearance,' says Rob Blair, personal trainer at Go Commando Personal Training ([www.gocommandopersonaltraining.co.uk](http://www.gocommandopersonaltraining.co.uk)). 'However, the simple-but-effective press-up can train, strengthen and develop the muscles underlying the front of the torso to assist in lifting the breast.' See Rob demonstrate the perfect press-up at [www.youtube.com/gocommandopt](http://www.youtube.com/gocommandopt).



Model  
Rachel  
Ward,  
1980

**IN MY CASE**

**'I can finally buy pretty bras'**

**SARAH O'DONNELL, 41,** a teaching assistant from Worthing, West Sussex had a breast reduction three years ago.



**BEFORE**

**I**'d always been big-breasted but, at the age of 19, my cup size shot up from an E to an FF,

and I really noticed the difference. People talked to my boobs instead of my face and I was the butt of jokes. I lost my confidence and became much more introverted as a result.

After I had children, my cup size increased again, this time to a JJ. I felt abnormal and so self-conscious I wouldn't even consider taking the children swimming. Shopping for clothes was a nightmare. Blouses gaped across my breasts and dresses looked like tents – my top half was size 20 and my hips were a 14. I lived in a uniform of trousers and T-shirts and had bad back problems, too.

The operation cost £6000 and I can honestly say it was worth every penny. My surgeon, Nicholas Parkhouse at McIndoe Surgical Centre ([www.mcindoe-surgical.co.uk](http://www.mcindoe-surgical.co.uk)), was absolutely fantastic and very supportive. He removed 2kg from my breasts, reducing them to a 34DD.

My breast reduction is one of the best things I've ever done. Apart from the way I look and being able to do everyday things, such as jogging and buying the clothes I like, I can finally buy pretty bras in Marks & Spencer – and the excitement of that will never die down!



**AFTER**

**Who wears what...?**  
 Famous vital statistics

- 34A** Audrey Hepburn  **Goldie Hawn**
- 34A** Goldie Hawn 
- 32B** Kate Moss 
- 32A** Keira Knightley 
- 34B** Jennifer Aniston 
- 36C** Angelina Jolie 
- 36D** Marilyn Monroe 
- 36D** Raquel Welch 
- 40DD** Dolly Parton 
- 36DD** Pamela Anderson 
- 32E** Kelly Brook 

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## A history of the bra

### 1914

**Mary Phelps-Jacobs, a New York socialite, patents the first bra.**

### 1920

Flat, boyish chests are de rigueur and women wear breast-minimising bras to disguise their assets.

### 1926

**Marks & Spencer sells its first bra to the nation.**

### 1927

William Rosenthal is granted a patent for the original uplifting Maidenform brassiere.

### 1935

**The Warner Brothers Corset Company introduces the first cup-sized bras, ranging from A to D.**

### 1950s

**Bras with cone-shaped cups are worn to exaggerate the female form, heralding the new feminine shape of sweater-girl actresses Jane Russell and Lana Turner. Bras are now made from nylon, instead of cotton, making them lighter.**

### 1962

The first breast-augmentation surgery takes place. The patient is 36-year-old mum of six Timmie Jean Lindsey of Texas, USA.

### 1968

**Germaine Greer declares bras 'a ludicrous invention', and liberated women assert their independence by burning them.**

### 1970s

The 'no-bra' look is popular and women favour unstructured cotton bra-tops offering little support.

### 1980s

**The rounded, well-padded breast is back and underwired bras are popular sellers.**

### 1990

Madonna wears Jean Paul Gaultier's conical bra, making underwear as outerwear fashionable.

### 1994

**Eva Herzigova stops traffic in the 'Hello boys' Wonderbra billboard campaign.**

### 1999

The Ultimo bra with its silicone, gel-filled pockets is launched.

### 2011

**Rigby and Peller, underwear supplier to the Queen, launch a 48N bra.**

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## From AA to... N

Ten years ago it was virtually impossible to find a bra bigger than a D cup on the high street and those that were available were more matronly than feminine. Now, around 70 per cent of Marks & Spencer bras go up to a G cup (with many styles rising to a J), Debenhams has introduced KK and John Lewis stocks a 48L.

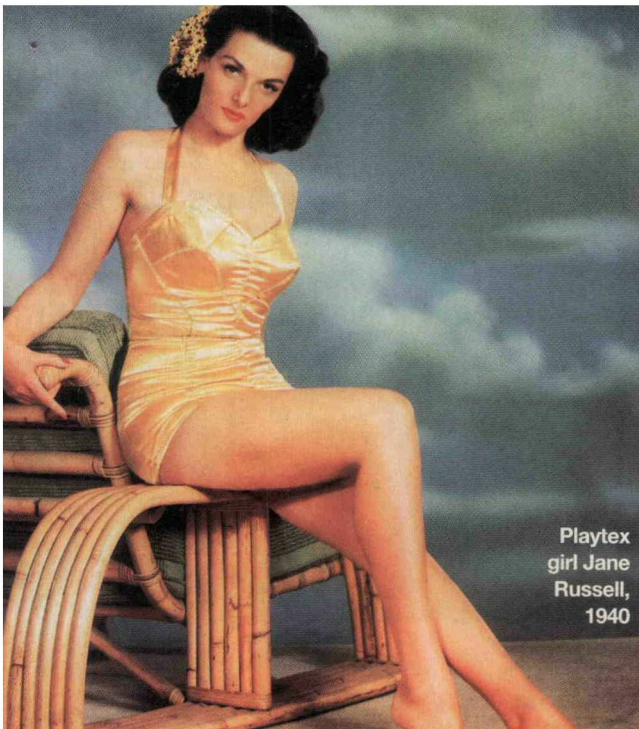
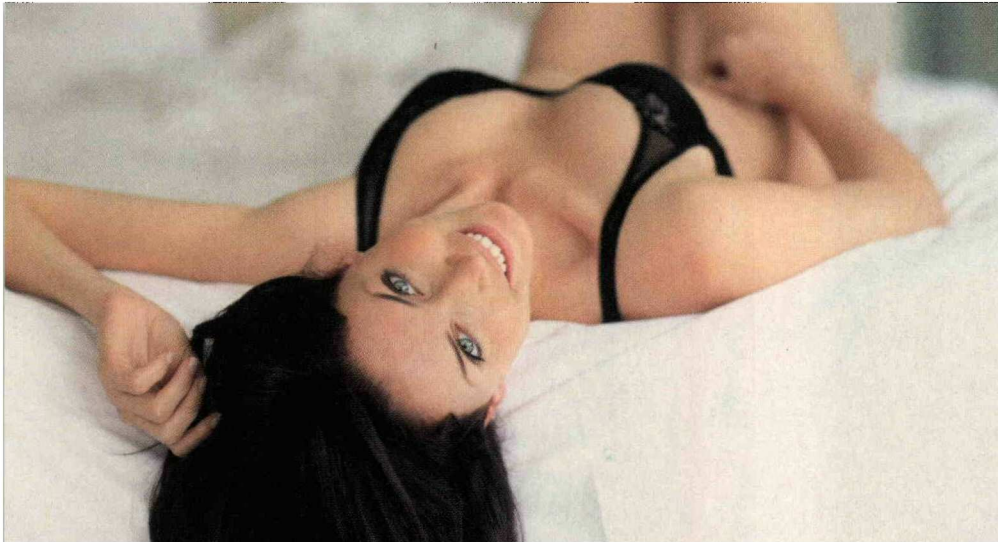
**'We've seen a steady flow of women around the UK who need an L cup bra,' says Jo.**

'Women are now thinking more about how their bra fits them, and more retailers are doing proper fittings to establish bra size, meaning women are often finding the size they've been wearing up until now is much too big in the back and too small in the cup.'

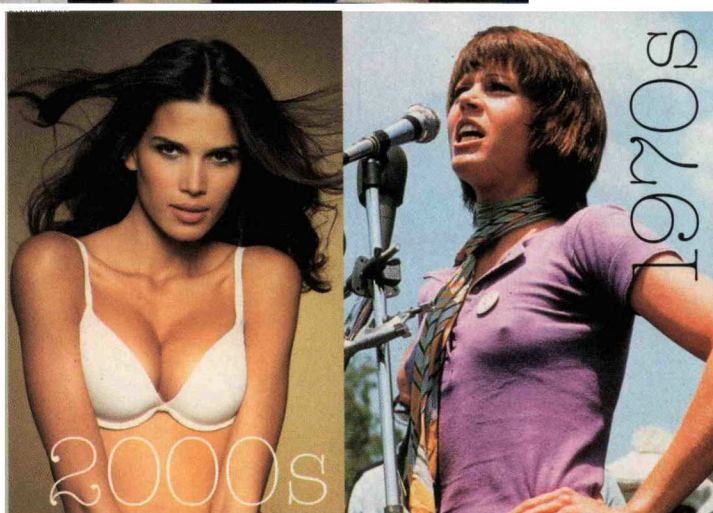
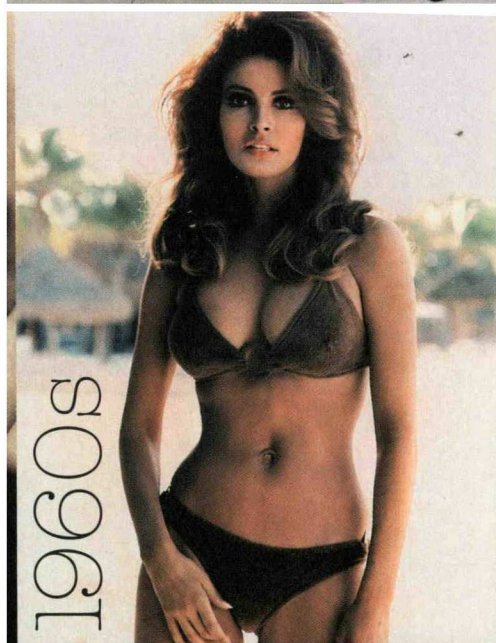
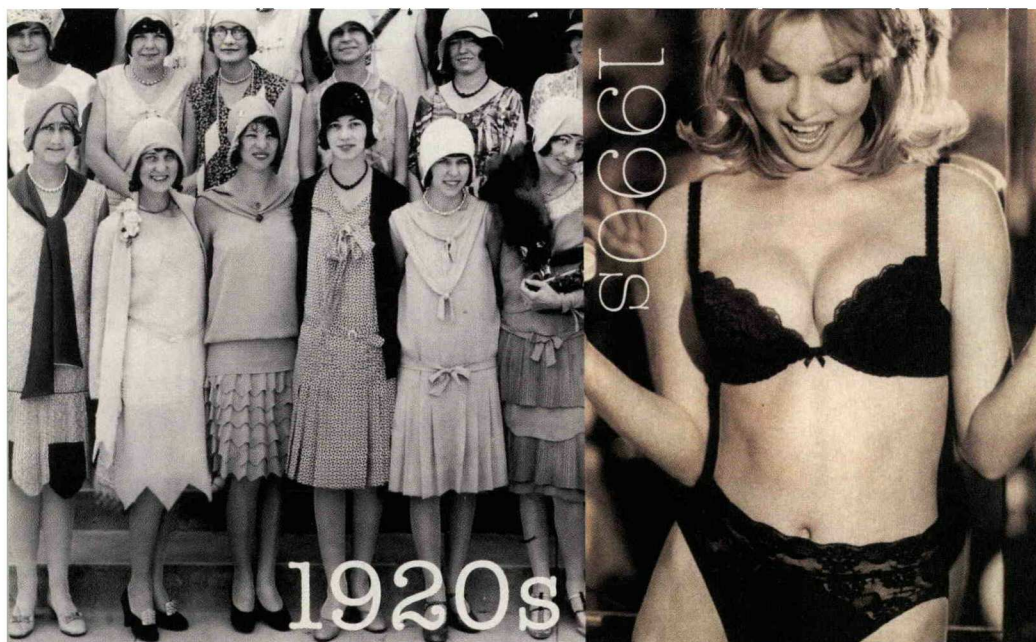


Upfront  
Raquel  
Welch,  
1967

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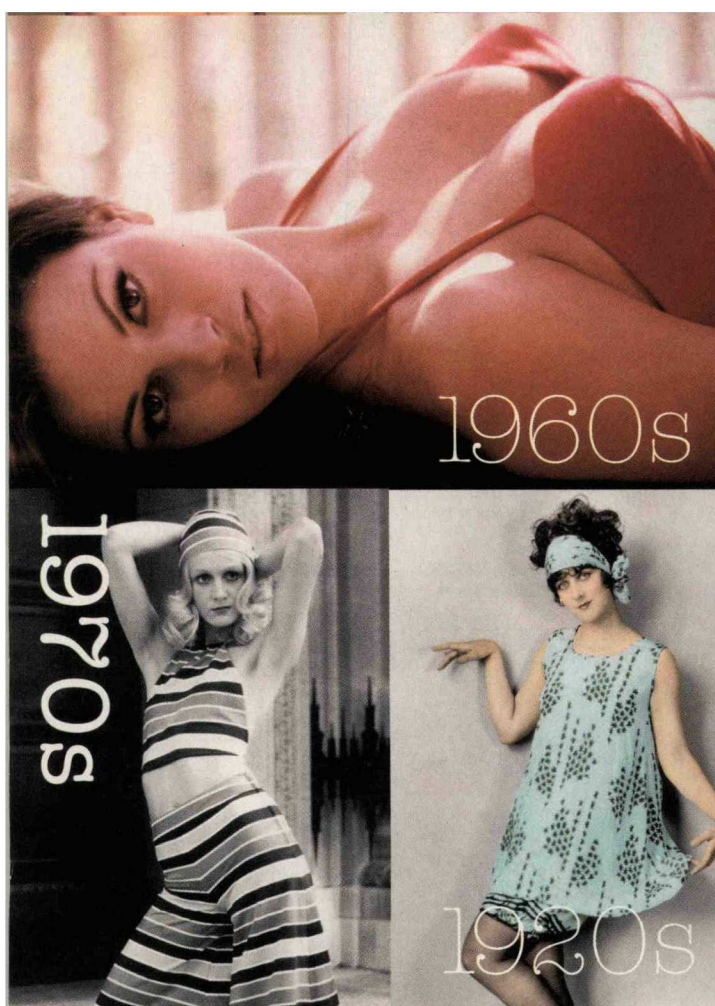


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