

Chest Binding FAQ

What is binding?

Chest binding is a way for people of any gender to relieve their dysphoria around their breast tissue development. It involves flattening breast tissue to create a flat, smooth chest contour using a tight-fitting garment called a binder.

Safe Binding

Using household items, such as stretchy bandages or duct tape can have the same effect as a binder, but they aren't made for binding and can cause physical harm. They can seriously restrict breathing, cause fluid buildup in your lungs, and can lead to serious injuries such as broken ribs.

We recommend you find a binder that fits you well- it should not be too small. Wearing a binder that's too tight puts you at risk for the same problems as binding with household materials. This is also true for wearing tape or another binder on top of your binder.

Give your body a break: don't bind 24/7 and avoid sleeping in the binder. In fact, you shouldn't bind for more than 8-10 hours at a time, as even high-quality binders can cause bruising or skin breakdown when overworn. You can use the time you're not binding to wash and air dry your binder, which will make it last longer.

Finding the Right Size

The following information is adapted from <http://www.gc2b.co>

Determining chest size:

Using a tape measure, take a snug measurement of the fullest part of your chest (the part that comes out the farthest) while clothed and write that number down. Measure underneath your chest where the crease is and write that number down as well. Add those numbers together and divide the sum by 2. This number is the "chest size" number which will likely fall in a range that corresponds with a binder size (S, M, L, XL, etc....)

Determining shoulder width:

Place the measuring tape at the point of one of your shoulders, then stretch the tape to the point of your other shoulder. Don't wrap the tape all the way around your shoulders. Try to stand up straight, and avoid hunching or tensing your shoulders.

You can use these measurements to determine your sizing. Different brands use different sizing charts, so be sure to refer to them when looking for your size. Match your chest measurement to the size of the sizing chart, and make sure that your shoulder width fits within that range. If you are in-between sizes, consider your shoulder measurements: If your shoulders are larger by 1.5 inches or more than the shoulder width that corresponds to your chest measurement on the sizing chart, select a larger size that best fits your shoulder measurement. If your shoulder width is smaller than the number that correlates to your chest measurement, select the size that best fits your chest measurement.

If you have a larger chest or broad shoulders, you may find a tank binder to be the most comfortable.

It is important to not purchase a binder that is smaller than your measured size as this will put extra pressure on your back and ribs and likely won't have any noticeable effect on the appearance of your chest.

Choosing a Binder

Binders typically come in two styles: short and long. Short binders end right at your waist, which can be good for staying cool in the summer, but tend to roll up and be less effective for folks who carry weight in their belly. Long binders can be pulled past your waist by several inches, but can still roll up. Wearing a belt can help with this!

If exercising, always use a binder that is specifically made for this purpose.

There are some binders made with zippers, velcro, or clasps, which are easier to maneuver than traditional single piece binders.

Where to Find Binders

There are a number of binder brands that are trusted within the community. Keep in mind that OHSU does not endorse any binder brand and your satisfaction with any given brand may vary.

Underworks is a popular brand that is trans-friendly and has a reputation for good customer support. They are known for long binders that do not have tummy compression. Their binders come in sizes up to 3X. If you are shopping on their website, you should look under the “men’s” section to find their everyday binders. They also make an “Extreme Magicotton sports and binding bra” in their “women’s” section, which is made for exercising.

Gc2b Transition Apparel is one of the more affordable brands which prices around \$35 and a variety of options for “nude” colors.

MyDouble Design makes a “cool mesh zipper” binder that zips up the middle for folks who have trouble putting on a traditional binder. Unfortunately, people needing plus-sized binders may have trouble finding the right size here.

ShapeShifters makes custom binders to your specifications, and will even widen or narrow the straps, raise or lower the armholes, or set the straps closer to the neck or farther apart upon request.

LOCAL RESOURCES

Shebop is a sex positive shop that sells binders as well as sex toys, videos, etc.... They offer personalized fittings for binders, and though they are an age 18+ shop, they offer appointments before or after hours for younger binder shoppers. You can schedule an appointment by calling or emailing them at info@sheboptheshop.com

The Pencil Test is a lingerie and bra shop located at 2407 NE Alberta Street in Portland. They are trans friendly and will do personalize fittings for binders. You may want to call ahead at (971)266-8611 to let them know you are coming.

How to Put on Your Binder

With your binder inside-out and upside-down, step into your binder. Pull the bottom up, with the long binders at your belt line and short binders at your natural waist. The binder should still be inside-out and upside-down. Use the straps as handles to pull the top of the binder (the end closer to your feet) up to your shoulders. Put your arms the straps and adjust your chest. You may need to pull the bottom of the binder out from underneath itself if you don't want it folded under. Others may leave it folded under to help stop the binder from rolling up.

Binding for All Bodies

Binding for Large Chests

Some larger-chested folks find it helpful to push their chest tissue towards their armpits, instead of letting the binder push the chest flat down. Others recommend pushing down-and-out, and still others suggest up-and-out. Experiment to see what works best with your body, both for appearance and for comfort.

You may have to adjust your tissue periodically throughout the day. Instead of judging how well your binder works by looking down, try looking at yourself in the mirror from the side. This is how everyone else will see you, and your chest will be more apparent when you look down at it than it actually is!

People with larger chests will need to give their bodies more breaks. Try your best to only bind 6-8 hours at a time and be more mindful to never bind overnight or while exercising. If your schedule makes this difficult, try and get creative with how you give your body rests, like going somewhere private and removing your binder on your lunch break or pledging to keep your binder off on weekends. For more binding tips on how to feel good about your body without the need of a binder, see “Alternatives to Binding”

Binding for Small Chests

Sports “bras” are designed to offer a decent level of compression without causing harm. For many, this can be just as effective as a binder while being cheaper and easier to buy.

Medical Considerations

Always consult your medical provider before you bind your chest.

Skin Health

Some skin conditions, like acne or eczema, may be worsened by binding, so be sure to check your skin when you remove your binder. You should not see redness or bleeding around the edges of the binder. If you do, it is too tight on your skin.

If your binder is aggravating your skin, try a thin cotton undershirt or tank underneath it. If this is uncomfortable, try applying unscented baby powder to your body before you put your binder on to absorb sweat and keep down sweat production (especially in the summer).

Binder Maintenance

Wash your binder regularly to prevent itchiness or rashes, especially during the warmer months. Wash your binder in cold water on a delicate cycle or hand wash it with detergent and warm water. Hanging is the best option for both drying and storing purposes, as this will help it maintain its shape. Avoid hot water and machine drying to prolong the life of your binder. If possible, have more than one binder available so that binder hygiene can be performed as regularly as needed.

Alternatives to Binding

Sometimes binding is simply not an option, which can be discouraging, but there are many ways to reduce your body dysphoria without binding. Wearing a tight-fitting undershirt or tank and using some smart layering can work surprisingly well. Try a looser t-shirt or a fitted button-down shirt to slim your chest.

Baggy clothing is less effective at making your body's curves less noticeable. If your shirt is too baggy, it can actually hang off your chest, creating more shadows and curves.

Dark colors, like blacks, browns, and navy can help hide depth. Try subtle patterns, vertical stripes, plaid, or a bold graphic, as solid colors can sometimes bring more attention to your chest.