

Breast health animation transcript

NARRATOR:

Breast pain and breast movement can impact on a woman's participation in sport and exercise, and on their ability to perform optimally in training. For example, women with a D-cup size or above do nearly 40% less high intensity physical activity, and cite their breasts as the main barrier.

Between 20% and 40% of active women report that breast pain interferes with their ability to train. Many of the problems women face during exercise can be alleviated by a well-fitting sports bra. However, up to 50% of women do not wear a sports bra during physical activity, instead selecting a less supportive everyday bra or wear a poorly fitting sports bra that does not provide optimum support and limit breast movement.

Breasts consist of fat and glandular tissue, and they can weigh up to two pounds each. They sit on top of the chest muscles, but these muscles offer them no support. The only support is provided by the Coopers ligaments, and the skin, which is the breast's main supporting structure.

After the age of 30, the skin starts to lose elasticity, and offers less support to the breast tissue. During exercise, movements cause repeated strain on the breasts' weak supporting structures. This is a particular problem in high impact sports that involve running and jumping, as well as horse riding, where the breasts experience repeated rapid loading. These forces can lead to irreversible damage to the ligaments and skin supporting the breasts.

There are significant variations in breast size and shape, with larger breasts placing more stress on their supporting structures and potentially causing more pain. The movement of poorly supported breasts can impact sporting performance by increasing muscle activity in the pectorals and deltoids using up valuable energy during exercise. Breast movement also contributes to a less economical running style and a decrease in stride length.

To illustrate the impact of breast movement on running performance, if you had two identical women running a marathon, one in a well-fitting sports bra and one in a poorly fitted sports bra, the woman with the perfectly fitted bra would finish around a mile ahead of the one wearing a poorly fitted bra.

A well fitted supportive sports bra can benefit all exercising females. Sports bras come in 3 styles differing in function and fit. Firstly, the compression sports bra that presses breast tissue against the chest wall. This is most suitable for females with smaller breasts or for low impact activities. They are usually a highly elasticated crop top style that is put over the head.

Secondly, encapsulation bras will benefit females with larger breasts or for high impact activities. They contain two structured cups to support each breast individually. This type of bra is adjustable, fastened around the underband and often has a secondary racer back fastening.

Thirdly combination bras are designed to encompass features of both types of design as they separate the breasts and support them individually but offer a layer of compression over the top of the cups. When choosing a sports bra, athletes need to consider the demands of their sport and focus on the fit rather than the size.