



A GUIDE TO BINDING

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The term "binding" refers to the process of flattening one's breast tissue in order to create a male-appearing chest. The type of materials and methods used for successful binding will vary depending on the size of one's chest and the overall build of one's body.

There is no "one-size-fits all" binding method because everyone is shaped differently, and we all have different levels of comfort with our bodies. Some trans* guys don't bind at all. Some slump or hunch over to hide their chests (which can be very effective but can also cause posture problems over time). Some use different methods of layering clothing to help hide their chests. Some bind only on certain occasions; some bind all the time.

For those who do choose to bind, a number of binding methods and tips are described below, along with contact information for companies that offer binding products.



Before you begin: General tips for all binding methods

Pain and discomfort

Certain methods of binding can be sweaty, uncomfortable, or even painful, as well as restrictive to your movement and even your breathing if done too tightly. Please use caution and common sense when binding-- if it hurts, cuts your skin, or prevents you from breathing, it is too tight.

In the past, trans* guys used to rely on do-it-yourself binding solutions because there weren't any ready-made products available to suit the purpose. Some of these DIY binding methods (like wrapping yourself in ace bandages or duct tape) are still easily accessible, but they are not good for your body, and can even cause serious injury. Now that there are safer binding methods available (and even binder donation programs for those who cannot afford a binder for example <http://lgbt.foundation/spotlight-morf/>), it is best to avoid methods like Ace bandages and tape and other DIY methods.

You may also be tempted to try buying a binder that is one size too small in the hopes that it will flatten your chest even more. Avoid this type of thinking and buy the size that correlates to your physical measurements. Binders are already designed to be very tight when they fit properly-- buying a size too small will be so tight that it may cause severe discomfort or injury.

Give yourself a break from binding! The compression on your skin and body from a binder is a lot to take, so don't bind all day and all night. And when you begin binding, start with just a few hours at a time to let your body get used to it. If possible bind for a maximum 9 hours a day.

Sweating and skin irritation

If a binder's material doesn't breathe or wick away sweat, you can end up with sores or rashes on your skin. One way to minimize this risk is to apply a non-irritating body powder to your skin before binding. Another is to wear a thin undershirt beneath your binder that is made of fabric that wicks away sweat. This can help absorb moisture and prevent irritation that may arise from scratchy binding materials. Remember to allow your skin some time off from binding, and keep your binders clean.

Do not use tape to bind, especially directly on your skin, as it may cut you, cause painful rashes, and pull off layers of skin and hair when removed. It also tends to be too rigid, making it difficult to breathe and move.

Binder modification

You might find that the binder you choose will tend to roll up in certain areas, particularly around the waist. If this is a problem for you, try sewing an extra length of fabric all the way around the bottom of the binder, and tuck that extra material snugly into your pants.

If you find that you have areas of chafing or bulging around the armpit area, you might want to try trimming and/or otherwise altering that area with a needle and thread. You can often find inexpensive solutions, such as spandex, Lycra, Velcro, and other materials at your local fabric store, using trial and error to make alterations that suit your specific frame.

It is worth checking with FTM organizations, FTM internet groups, and FTM web pages for advice on common binding challenges and problems; many guys have come up with brilliant adaptations to various types of binders that involve minimal cost and a few sewing skills.

If you are not handy with a needle and thread, check your local community for a friendly tailor or costume maker who might be able to help you custom fit your binder, or even make a binder from scratch to fit you perfectly.

Other tips

If economically feasible, try to experiment with binding methods to find something as comfortable and breathable as possible while still maintaining a look for your chest that you can live with. If a binder doesn't work well for you, consider donating it or selling it to another trans man who might have better luck with it.

Binding methods

Layering of shirts

If you don't want to wear any type of binding device, or if you are taking a day off from binding to give your chest a breather, you might be able to layer your clothes in a way that hides your breasts. Try wearing a tight fitting undershirt or sports bra as a bottom layer to keep things from moving around a lot, then a loose t-shirt (or two loose t-shirts) over that). Each successive layer should be looser than the one underneath. A button down shirt as the top layer can help hide not only the chest but also wider hips or narrow shoulders. Of course, wearing lots of shirts can get quite uncomfortable in warm weather; breathable and moisture-wicking fabrics can help combat this problem.

Sports bra

A tight-fitting sports bra works well for some guys, while others sometimes use a combination of two or three sports bras in layers to accomplish the desired look. You might want to use a sports bra in combination with a layering of shirts as described above. Many companies make sports bras, and it may be worth the effort to go to a sporting goods store and try on several brands to see which one works the best for your shape. Look for bras with a high Lycra content for compression.

Neoprene waist/abdominal trimmers or back support devices

Neoprene is a thick, rubbery material-- if you've ever seen a wet suit, that's neoprene. It is often used for knee, elbow, or other athletic braces. The advantages of neoprene and rubber-type devices are that they flatten the chest very effectively, are fairly inexpensive (between £10 and £20), and are easily found in large chain discount stores and sports shops. The bad thing about them is that the material doesn't breathe at all, which means that sweat, heat, chafing, and even blisters can be a problem. They can also smell a bit rubbery. Some guys wear a moisture-wicking thin undershirt or absorbent body powder underneath neoprene to help prevent chafing.

Neoprene waist trimmers and back supports are designed to wrap around the torso. They are usually red or blue on one side and black on the other side, with some kind of Velcro closure. Wrap the neoprene around your chest tightly, and fasten so that the Velcro closure is placed along your side, underneath your arm, so it is less visible through your clothes. You may need to carefully trim the binder to fit your size. If the Velcro closure loses its effectiveness over time, you might try sewing on new fasteners to get more life out of the binder.

Athletic compression shirts

A number of athletic apparel manufacturers make performance garments called "compression shirts." These shirts are very tight fitting, and are usually made from Spandex, Lycra, or similar stretchy material. Compression shirts are designed to aid in muscle recovery, and often have excellent moisture wicking properties. Companies like Underarmour (www.underarmour.com) and Sweat it Out (www.sweatitout.com) make compression gear for athletes.

A number of sporting good retail stores carry Underarmour shirts (as well as some other compression brands), so you might be able to find a place near you to try them on. Recommended Underarmour shirts are the Men's HeatGear Full T (£23.00), the Men's HeatGear Sleeveless T (£23.00), as well as sport-specific variations of compression shirts that are added to their line periodically.

In general, look for items in the "heat gear" category of compression shirts, as these are designed to be very breathable and help keep you dry. Searching on the Underarmour site for "heat gear compression" will turn up a variety of results. Underarmour also has youth sizes if you need something smaller-- the youth sizes are also less expensive.

People with minimal chest tissue can sometimes use athletic compression shirts successfully as binders. However, those with medium-to-large amounts of tissue will probably find that these types of shirts do not have enough compression to flatten the chest. People with larger chests should work the best for your shape. Look for bras with a high Lycra content for compression.

Consider medical/binding compression wear as described in the following sections.

Chest binders/medical compression shirts

There are a number of products on the market made for non-trans males who have large chests due to excessive body weight or due to gynecomastia (a condition of enlarged breast tissue in men). These products usually require shopping through a specialty supplier, but they typically provide more compression than the typical athletic compression shirt. Each of the companies listed below offers compression wear that can be used quite effectively for binding.

Determining bra and cup size to get the correct measurement for a chest binder

Perhaps ironically, it can sometimes be helpful to know your bra and cup size when it comes to purchasing a chest binder. Although this can be a very dysphoric experience it is important that you have this information so that you purchase the right size chest binder.

Described below are two popular ways to calculate your bra and cup size should you need this information for binding. Keep in mind that each bra company may come up with its measurements in a slightly different way, such that a 32 B in one company might fit slightly differently than another company's 32 B. These methods should get you started-- whenever possible, check with the company you are buying from to see if they have a recommended measuring/sizing guide.

For both measuring methods described below, you'll need two measurements: your frame size and your frame + breast size.

Method 1

Frame size

Your frame (band) size is obtained by measuring the diameter around your ribcage (in inches) just below your breasts (i.e. no breast tissue should be part of the measurement) and then adding 5 inches to that number. Why? That is just the standard that many bra companies profess to use. So, if your frame measurement is 27, then you would wear a size 32 bra ($27 + 5 = 32$).

Frame + breast size

Next, measure (in inches) around the chest, over and including the largest part of the breast (usually around the level of the nipples)(cup). If your breast tissue droops a lot, it might be best to do this measurement in a comfortable sports bra if you have one.

Subtract the first measurement from the second measurement, and use the table below to determine your cup size. Example: If your frame measurement is 27, add 5 to get 32. If your frame plus breast measurement is 34, then 34 minus 32 is 2 inches, or a "B" cup. Your bra size is therefore 32 B.

| DIFFERENCE | CUP SIZE |
|-----------------------|-----------------|
| 0 to 1/2 inch | AA |
| 1/2 to 1 inch | A |
| 1 to 2 1/2 inches | B |
| 2 1/2 to 3 1/2 inches | C |
| 3 1/2 to 4 1/2 inches | D |
| 4 1/2 to 6 inches | DD (E) |
| 6 to 7 inches | DDD (F) |
| 7 to 8 inches | G |

Keep in mind that these measurements are just general standards. Like many women's clothing measurements, they sometimes vary depending on the manufacturer or style. That being said, these measurements should give you enough information for a good idea of bra and cup size if you need them.

Method 2

Frame size

Your frame size is obtained by measuring the diameter around your upper chest (in inches) at the area just below your armpits and above your breasts. If this measurement is an even number, this is your frame size. If an odd number, add 1 inch to determine your frame size.

Frame + breast size

Next, measure (in inches) around the chest, over and including the largest part of the breast (usually around the level of the nipples). If your breast tissue droops a lot, it might be best to do this measurement in a comfortable sports bra if you have one.

Subtract the first measurement from the second measurement, and use the table below to determine your cup size.

Example: If your frame measurement is 32, and your frame plus breast measurement is 34, then 34 minus 32 is 2 inches, or a "B" cup. Your bra size is therefore 32 B.

DIFFERENCE

CUP SIZE

less than 1 inch

AA

1 inch

A

2 inches

B

3 inches

C

4 inches

D

5 inches

DD (E)

6 inches

DDD (F)

7 inches

DDDD (G)

8 inches

FF

Keep in mind that these measurements are just general standards. Like many women's clothing measurements, they sometimes vary depending on the manufacturer or style. That being said, these measurements should give you enough information for a good idea of bra and cup size if you need them

Never guess your size if you are buying a chest binder as it more than likely to be the wrong size and it will be no use to you. You may want to purchase more than one binder at a time as you will need to wash and care for your binder, having a spare means you always have the opportunity to bind safely.

Caring for your chest binder

- Soak in water for a while then gently hand-wash and dry it. Don't add any fabric softener while you wash it.
- Allow to dry naturally, don't use a tumble dryer.

Results vary

The aim of people who bind is to achieve the flattest look possible for their chest. Binding gains, a more masculine shape and can also reduce the individual's gender dysphoria.

Once your chest is bound and flatter do not look down at your chest as you may not be visually happy with the results; instead if possible look at your appearance in a full length mirror this gives a better perspective and this is what other people will see. If your unable to look in a full length mirror you could ask for a friends opinion on how you look.

Depending on your binder choice and your lifestyle you may have to readjust and reposition several times a day to achieve the best results for you.

