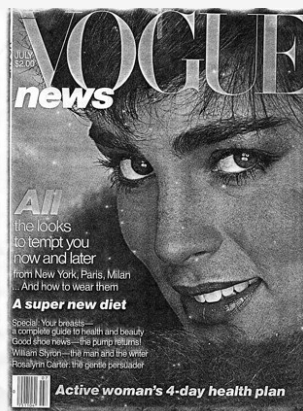




Breast Fitness

Women with very large breasts must use extra caution



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Breast Fitness: Strengthening and Protecting the Pectoral Muscles

This article discusses the importance of strengthening pectoral muscles and protecting the breasts, especially for women involved in sports. It provides a series of exercises designed to strengthen the chest muscles, including pressing the spine against a door edge and various arm and leg movements. The article warns against attempting push-ups without proper instruction and supervision due to the risk of back injury.

The article also highlights the need for women to develop protective equipment for their unique anatomical needs, citing a study that found 31% of women athletes experience breast problems, often due to not wearing bras or wearing bras that cause discomfort or injury. It mentions two sports bras recommended by Dr. Haycock, and another that is less acceptable as it compresses the breasts against the chest wall.

Dr. Ariel, director of research at Computerized Biomechanical Analysis, Inc., advises women to consider their individual traits and protect their bodies. He suggests that women with large breasts should run on soft surfaces or swim, and that running should be broken up into shorter stints to avoid fatigue and injury. He also recommends a sports bra with a wide, slightly stretchable cotton band under the cups for support.

The article concludes by discussing an inflatable protective jacket designed by Dr. Ariel for activities involving hard falls or rough contact, and the importance of breast protection in sports like fencing. It also explains the potential for injury to the breast, including the formation of a lump due to a blood clot or injured fat cells, and the importance of distinguishing these injuries from breast cancer.

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BREAST FITNESS

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should feel a steel-like band just above the breast. That's the pectoral muscle. She teaches the following exercises for strengthening these chest muscles: (Each is to be done in times in walk rhythm—move on the first count, then hold for two counts.)

• Press your spine (shoulder-blade region to tail bone) against the edge of a door.

• Face the edge of a door and, standing slightly away from it, squeeze the door with your hands straight up.

• Sit with your legs about a foot apart. Lean forward so you can put your right elbow against your left knee, stabilize your arm, and then try to press your legs together. Reverse. (The name of this routine, "The Thinker," should tell you what it looks like.)

• Cross your arms over your front so that each hand is on the opposite shoulder. Hug yourself while you press your shoulders down, keeping each elbow in a downward "Y" configuration.

• Pull your left knee up with your left hand, keeping your left arm very close to your body; then put your knee back, trying to feel your shoulder press down as you reach away. Reverse.

• Abandoning the waltz time, lie face-down with your arms spread, pressing your arms and hands into the floor for a count of five. Then lift your arms for a count of five. Repeat this "Heaven and Earth" ten times.

Although push-ups are the time-honored way to build the pectoral muscles, Miss Corti cautions that no one should attempt them without instruction and supervision, as the wrong technique may injure the back.

More and more women can do "men's push-ups" now, as well as participate in regular jogging, professional basketball, football, and ice and field hockey, but they haven't had enough time at these activities to safeguard themselves—particularly their breasts—adequately.

For years men have been working to perfect special protective equipment," says Christine E. Haycock, M.D., associate professor of surgery at New Jersey Medical School in Newark. "It's about time that women begin to develop equipment to meet their own special anatomical needs."

After studying the hazards of female sports, including taking a physical-education poll at three hundred universities, Dr. Haycock found that 31 percent of women athletes say they experience breast problems and that some suffered breast soreness and tenderness because they did not wear bras. In 17 percent of the reported injuries, however, the bra was the cause of the problem—abrasion, slippage, discomfort, or bruises from its metal or plastic fasteners.

There are two sports bras, now available in athletic clothing stores, that Dr. Haycock likes and another that she feels is less acceptable because it compresses the breasts against the chest wall and only a woman with very small breasts could derive any benefit from it.

Cynthia Ariel, Ph.D., director of research at Computerized Biomechanical Analysis, Inc., in Amherst, Massachusetts, and chairman of the U.S. Olympic Committee, studies all kinds of human motions to design improved equipment, including sports bras and running shoes, for various manufacturers. He reminds women to take their own individual traits into account and to protect their bodies.

"I know jogging is extremely popular now," Dr. Ariel says, "but women with very large breasts must use extra caution—they should be sure to run on soft surfaces. Swimming is a much better exercise for them. Even small-breasted women would be well advised to run on soft rather than hard surfaces, since less of a shock is transmitted to the breasts if the feet can sink into the ground a little at each landing. Soft sand is the best medium to run on because it minimizes the shock to the breasts by as much as 50 percent."

Another of Dr. Ariel's tips for joggers, although he admits it may be too inconvenient for some people, is to break up the running period into three short sprints of one mile or less at a time—morning, noon, and night. This practice helps the runner avoid fatigue, which may prevent injury.

"As soon as you get tired, you stop running in top form and let your bones take the force," he explains. "The longer the distance you go in this fashion, the lower the ability of the muscles and ligaments to absorb the shock."

In all of his studies, Dr. Ariel has never come across any hard evidence to prove that exaggerated motion during athletics causes the breasts to sag, although he does happen to believe this is true. (Related research shows that constantly stretched tissue does not recover its original shape.) The kind of sports bras that Dr. Ariel recommends for women athletes is one with a wide, slightly stretchable cotton band under the cups to help to distribute pressure over the largest possible area. Elastic under the breasts, he finds, either cuts the skin or is so yielding that it offers no support.

For activities that routinely involve hard falls, body blows, or rough contact, Dr. Ariel has designed an inflatable protective jacket that weighs only a few grams. "Figure skaters in training may spend six or seven hours a day on the ice," he says. "They fall so much when they're trying new stunts that they really need good protection. With this jacket, they don't get bruised at all."

The jacket, which may become commercially available within the year, should not be suitable for figure-skating competition because of its bulky appearance, Dr. Ariel says. But in any sport where women are expected to wear protective gear—baseball, hockey—such a garment would prove invaluable.

Probably the only sport that has a respectable history of breast protection is fencing, where the dangers are so obvious that women have always worn durable safety guards.

Because the breast contains a rich blood supply and a great deal of fat, blows to the breast usually result in hemorrhage and destruction of fat cells, according to Robert E. Rothenberg, M.D., author of *The Complete Book of Breast Care* (Crown).

"A lump usually forms within minutes or hours following a striking blow as blood seeps into the breast substance," Dr. Rothenberg writes. "The area swells and becomes increasingly tender to the touch."

"Most direct injuries to the breast subside spontaneously over a period of several days, although the lump created by the trauma may persist for several weeks. Ordinarily, the blood clot that has collected at the site of the injury will be absorbed, as will the injured fat cells." Sometimes, he adds, a woman who discovers a hard lump of fat necrosis in her breast may think she has breast cancer, but tests can readily distinguish injury from disease. V

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