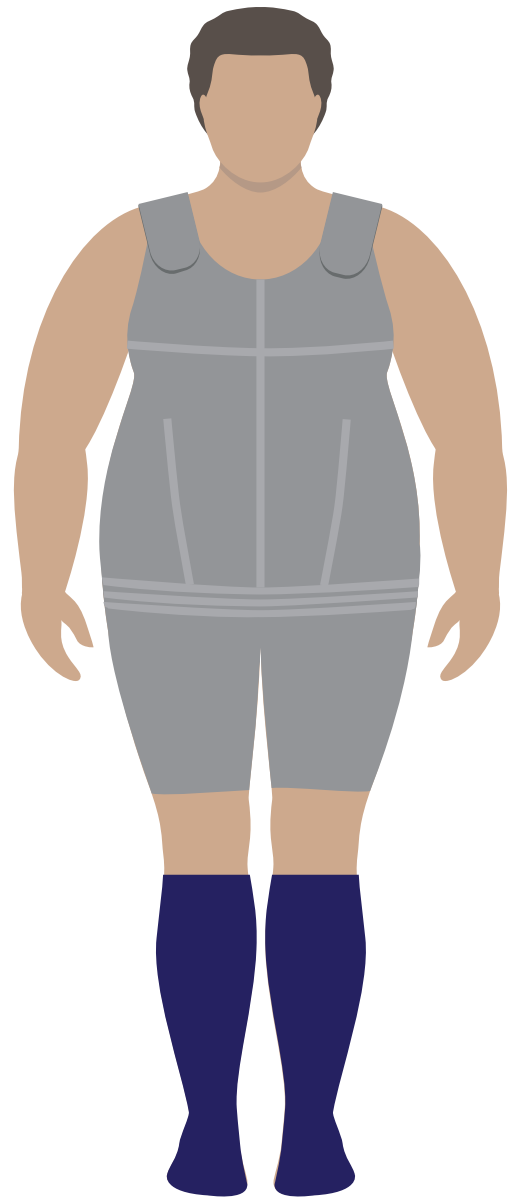
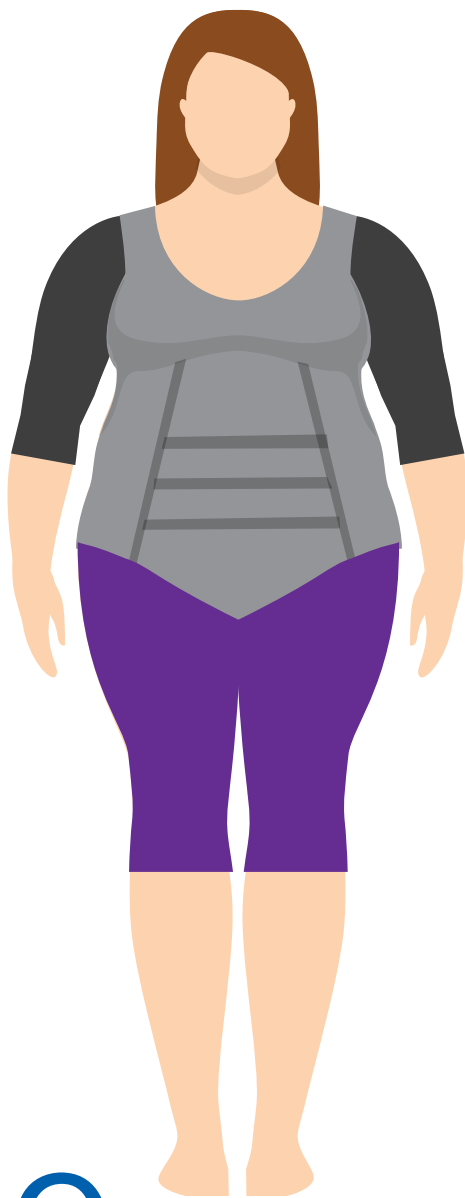


Are Specialized Garments the **Right Fit** For You?



A Q&A with Mary Forhan, PhD, MHSc, BSc OT

People who have experienced weight loss may have excess skin or tissue that interfere with movement and comfort during exercise or in daily activities. Some individuals, on the other hand, may not experience any significant difficulties resulting from excess skin, but may want a little help with gravity to control the shape of their body. A variety of garments, intended for wearing under clothing, are available by prescription or off the shelf at specialty or department stores.



prescription by a physician. The purpose of a compression garment is to improve venous return (the rate of blood flow back to the heart) and oxygenation to muscles. Compression socks or stockings are the most common types of garments prescribed.

Other types of compression garments are those that are recommended for use after surgery. These include chest binders used after breast augmentation, open heart surgery or other types of procedures that require post-surgical support of an area of the body. They are usually worn for a few days or weeks to help promote healing.



What is a support garment?

Support garments, also referred to as “shapewear,” can provide support and also function as a temporary way to manipulate body shape. Support garments, like compression garments, are form-fitting, but the amount of compression is typically below 20–30 mmHg. A support garment is not intended to treat a health condition, but wearing a support garment may help a person feel more confident and comfortable going about daily activities and participating in physical fitness.

The benefits of wearing a support garment vary from person to person but can include feeling more balanced and less likely to stumble or fall, more confident about their appearance and less fatigued. Garments that lift and support the body can reduce the number of skin folds and bulk, thereby reducing rashes and potential chafing. Garments are available that provide support for all areas of the body, such as the arms, chest, abdomen, and upper and lower legs (including the buttocks). A fabric that wicks moisture away from the body and helps to control body temperature is an important consideration.

Support garments or shapewear can be purchased without a prescription. Look for stores that employ staff who are trained to help customers find the best garment to meet their individual size, shape and needs. ➡



What is a compression garment?

A compression garment is considered a medical device and therefore must be prescribed and fit by a licensed healthcare professional. Compression garments are typically used to help patients manage lymphedema (the swelling of limbs resulting from poor lymph node drainage) or other issues related to circulation and to reduce the risk of developing blood clots. Compression garments fit very tightly on the body and are rated in terms of the amount of compression they provide. Garments that provide a compression of 20–30 mmHg or higher usually require a

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Can wearing a garment for support or compression be harmful?

Yes. A prescription for a compression garment should come with detailed instructions on how to use the garment, and signs and symptoms to look for that indicate any problems. Contact your licensed healthcare professional immediately if you have any concerns or questions.

Support garments or shapewear come with risks as well. A garment that is too tight can cut off blood circulation to areas of the body, resulting in numbness, skin rashes, blisters or sores. They can restrict the ability to breath normally, which can lead to shortness of breath, increased heart rate and, in some cases, fainting. Garments that do not fit properly on the abdomen can result in the squeezing of internal organs, including the stomach, which can lead to acid being pushed into the esophagus, causing reflux. Garments that are too tight and put pressure on the lower abdominal and pelvis area can cause urinary incontinence or worsen irritable bowel symptoms.

Check the list of materials used in the garment to make sure you aren't allergic to any of them. Proper care of garments is also important to reduce the risk of infections caused by bacterial buildup in fabrics. Follow the washing and care instructions that should be listed on a label attached to the garment.



How do I know if a garment is the right choice for me?

Before purchasing a compression or support garment, think about the reasons you are seeking support. There should be a medical condition or risk that warrants the use of any garment that claims to provide compression to improve circulation, promote healing or reduce the risk of

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developing a blood clot. In such cases, discuss options with your physician and review your choice of garments with a retailer that has staff trained to fit compression garments. Don't be afraid to ask about the credentials of those recommending and selling compression garments.

Support garments simply restrict or reduce the movement of excess skin or tissue during everyday types of activities, including moderate to strenuous physical activity. The garment should be tight enough to reduce the movement of skin and tissue, but not so tight as to restrict circulation and range of motion.

Look for a variety of support garments that you can customize based on the amount of support you need. For example, you can wear a lighter, less supportive garment when going about light to moderate daily activities and opt for a more sturdy, tighter-fitting garment to wear only during the times that you require more support, such in the case of moderate to more strenuous physical activity (like heavy lifting). Regardless of the type of support you want, always try garments on before buying them and shop at a retailer that has knowledgeable staff who are available for consultations. This will ensure that the recommended garment is safe, comfortable and is properly fit. ■



Do you have questions or ideas for articles about how we look and how we feel on the weight-loss journey? Send them to share@tops.org.

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