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Location: Illinois Chapter

1. What are the latest trends in women's workout clothing?

- Current trends are mostly related to style and color vs. a lot of new technology. Fun things like air vents, thumbholes in jackets and other gadgetry always abound, but there is nothing really new. Compression garments and socks have been around for a while and are used by some to prevent injury and improve circulation. Minimalist shoes for runners have also been around for a while, but continue in popularity.

2. How can women identify well-made workout clothes and related gear; how can they spot poorly made or performing items?

- Pretty much the same as regular clothes; just looking at the craftsmanship, feeling the fabric, etc. Shoes are really important and there is a real difference in lower end vs. higher end shoes. Running shoes that you can get at a discount store may look the same as shoes from a running store, but they are "empty" inside. None of the technology is there. Running shoes (that walkers should wear as well) have a lot of research and technology behind them to help the athlete prevent injury and maximize performance. Like anything else, for the most part, you get what you pay for. That being said, there are certain things you probably want to invest in; number one your shoes and items closest to your body like your sports bra, socks and undergarments because you want the quality to protect your body. Workout shirts you can purchase at a discount store and you will be okay. Most sporting goods stores have great clearance areas where you can pick up technical clothing out of season.

3. What are the various components of workout clothes and gear and how can these features help during a workout (e.g., vented sides, wicking material, etc.)?

- Wicking material is super important. Cotton absorbs sweat. If you are exercising in the heat it will make you hotter and more prone to chafe. If you are exercising in the winter it will make you colder. All wicking materials pull moisture away, making the sweat dissipate throughout the material. The fibers of material are also coated with a water repellent or it is woven into the material itself which makes the moisture more readily available for evaporation and leads to quicker drying. You can buy virtually any item of workout clothing in wicking fabric; sports bras, underwear, socks and hats. The more wicking material you are wearing, the more comfortable you will likely be. The other area that technology is important in is shoes (see question 1).

4. Sports bras: women with larger chests may have a difficult time finding the right support; what should they look for in a great sports bra?

- Sports bras are an important piece of equipment! It doesn't matter what size you are, women need good support to be able to exercise comfortably and avoid injury. The first thing to consider is the type of exercise you will be doing and the amount of impact involved. Biking, athletic walking, yoga and weight training are lower impact activities. Running and aerobic exercises classes are higher impact activities. The higher impact the activity, the more support you will need. Compression bras are best for smaller cup sizes and restrict movement by compressing the breasts against the chest wall. Racer-back styles are your best bet for higher impact activities and, of course, the wider the straps, the greater the support. Encapsulation bras are best for bigger cup sizes. These bras are more like a traditional bra with cups to support each breast separately and they offer more support. Additionally there are combination bras which provide both compression and encapsulation. If you do different activities you will want to get the appropriate bra for each activity.

5. For women who are self-conscious about their bodies, are there good options for working out (e.g., alternatives to big, baggy T-shirts)?

- It really depends on preference. Just like with "regular" clothes, no matter what their size, some people prefer looser fitting clothing and others prefer more form fitting items. Thankfully, many vendors are aware of the need to have clothes for all shapes and sizes. If you prefer the support of compression but don't like to wear it alone there are a couple of great alternatives. You can buy two layer running shorts with the compression layer sewn right in. Another choice is a running skort which has shorts or a compression layer underneath and a feminine (and forgiving) skirt over it. Even if you prefer looser tops you can still purchase brightly colored, V neck, workout specific tops that will fit better and make you feel better while working out.