

History of Corsets

Corsets began to appear in fashion in the 16th century in order to allow women to fit into the long dresses and gowns that were in style at the time. A corset gave women an hourglass shape and enhanced the bustline, something that many still seek today.

Early corsets were made out of suede, satin, or linen and used animal bones (whalebone was popular) or wooden stakes to keep the corset's shape. Many women envision early corset-wearers fainting from the corset's tightness or taking it off only to find it had broken one of their ribs, but this was simply not the case. Most women actually enjoyed wearing corsets because they provided increased back support and helped with back problems caused by large breasts. They also helped keep a straighter posture and balance out the fullness of large gowns and skirts.

Besides being used to push up and enhance the bustline, flat, hard pieces of material called busks were also used to completely flatten the chest in some styles found in England and Western Europe.

In the 18th century, the corset began to become more practical. Although they served essentially the same purpose as styles worn earlier, women had more mobility and were able to work while still remaining comfortable.

The most popular image of the corset that still remains today is the Victorian corset, which is often re-created for current styles by companies like Axfords based out of England. Throughout the 19th century, the Victorian corset developed into a more exaggerated version of the sought-after hourglass shape, often incorporating styles that fell past the hips, instead of stopping just below the natural waistline.

The practice of 'tightlacing' also became popular during this time. Women would cinch their corsets extremely tight, creating an unnatural waist, sometimes measuring only 16-20 inches (a 'perfect' waist measurement in the modeling industry today is 24 inches).

Tightlacing comes back in and out of style every 20 years or so. It was popular during WWII, then again in the 70s. Some experts in the style industry have predicted that tightlacing will come back into style in the early 21st century.

To this day, corsets remain a fun and function staple for any woman's wardrobe. Corsets can be worn as lingerie for a special evening with a significant other, or they can be used under elegant formal gowns to correctly shape and slim a woman's natural figure.

For whatever the occasion, it is important to note that corsets should never cause any major discomfort, pain, or shortness of breath. If this occurs, the corset should be removed immediately and exchanged for a bigger size. To get the correct corset, make sure all body measurements are correct and the style of corset is right for the circumstance.