

BINDING: CREATING A MALE-APPEARING CHEST

INTRODUCTION

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 a guy's chest and the overall build of his body.

Some guys don't bind at all and end up slumping or hunching 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 custom-made binding products. Keep in mind that other FTMs are great resources when it comes to sharing binding tips and tricks. They may also be able to guide you to used binder exchange programs--many guys who have chest surgery often pass on their old binders to others at minimal or no cost.

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.

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 of minimizing this risk is to apply corn starch or Gold Bond powder to your skin before binding. Another is to wear a thin cotton undershirt beneath your binder to help absorb moisture and prevent irritation that may arise from scratchy binding materials. Remember to allow your skin time off from binding so that it can breathe.

Binder Adjustment

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, you can 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, and use 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 do-it-yourself adaptations to various types of binders that involve minimal cost and maybe a few sewing skills.

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.

Finally, give yourself a break from binding now and then to let your skin breathe and to ease up on any aches and pains the binder may cause.

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 get away with layering your clothes in a way that hides your breasts. Try wearing a tight fitting a-shirt (sleeveless 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 some of other more female-looking body features that some guys deal with, such as wider hips or narrow shoulders. Of course, wearing lots of shirts can get quite uncomfortable in warm weather; breathable white cotton shirts can help combat this problem.

Ace Bandage Method

The advantage of this method is that it is fairly inexpensive, but it can be very uncomfortable and restrictive if the bandages are wrapped too tightly. When choosing bandages, try to buy the widest available. Push the breasts away from the center of your chest (squishing them toward the armpit area) to try to flatten the area around the breastbone. If your breasts are very small, you might be able to get away with pushing them up and outward, then flattening, creating the look of pectoral muscles. Wrap the bandages tightly (remember to be able to move reasonably and breathe), and secure with a few safety pins. Make sure to wrap the bandages up high enough to keep the whole thing from slipping or rolling down. You might want to wear an extra t-shirt or an a-shirt underneath your clothing to help hide the contours of the bandages and help the chest look more natural.

Control-Top Hose/"Biker Shorts" Method

This method is also inexpensive, but really only effective for guys with small chests. Buy a pair of women's control-top panty hose, cut

off the legs, and carefully make a hole in the crotch area for your head to go through. Pull the binder on upside-down over your head, slipping your arms through the leg holes. You can also try this method with a pair of spandex "biking" shorts (without the padded crotch found in real biker's shorts), but it is a bit more expensive. Sports Bra, "Frog Bra," or "The Bro"

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 binds the best for your shape.

The Frog Bra by Title 9 Sports (\$29.00) is recommended by many guys for its 32% lycra content which provides better compression than most sports bras, which have a lower lycra content.

Title 9 Sports
www.title9sports.com
6201 Doyle St.
Emeryville, CA 94608
800-342-4448

The Enell Sports Bra Company makes a product called The Bro which is designed specifically for men with gynecomastia (a condition of enlarged breast tissue in men--see more on this condition in the section "Compression Shirts/Gynecomastia Vests" below). The product is not shown on the website; it is custom-made for \$64.00. Contact Enell directly for more information, as they will make it to fit your specifications.

Enell
www.enell.com
800-828-7661
info@enell.com

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 things like 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 \$7 and \$20), and are easily found in drug stores or large chain discount stores. 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 serious problem. They can also smell a bit rubbery. Some guys wear an a-shirt with cornstarch or Gold Bond powder underneath the binder to help absorb moisture and prevent chafing. Neoprene waist trimmers and back supports are usually red or blue on one side and black on the other side, with some kind of velcro closure. Wrap the binder 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 hook-type fasteners to get more life out of the binder.

Gynecomastia Vests/Compression Shirts

There are a number of products on the market made for bio-males who have large chests due to excessive body weight or due to gynecomastia (a condition of enlarged breast tissue in men). The website www.gynecomastia.org lists numerous resources for men living with this condition. These products tend to be a little more expensive than the binding solutions listed above, and usually require going to a specialty supplier, but they tend to provide more comfortable and breathable solutions.

"Compression shirts" are made for a variety of uses: for men with gynecomastia, for people recovering from liposuction or cosmetic surgery, for people who want to smooth out bulges in their physique, and for athletes who are looking for better performance (compression shirts have been shown to reduce muscle fatigue). Each of the companies listed below focuses on a different application for their compression products, but all can be used effectively for binding, depending on your body type and needs.

Morris Designs
www.morrisdesigns.com
2216 Commerce Pkwy
Virginia Beach, VA 23454
800-766-5578
Fax: 1-757-463-9349
morrisdesigns@aol.com

Morris Designs specializes in durable compression wear. They make three versions of their Gynecomastia Vest (each costs \$52.00) and a model called the Zippered Male Vest with reinforced chest panels (also for \$52.00). They also make a simple velcro wrap-around binder called the Dale Binder (\$34.00-\$44.00, depending on size) which could be used for chest binding, though perhaps not as comfortably or effectively as the vests.

Morris Designs does custom orders for people who might need a special size; check their website or call them for details.

Underworks
www.underworks.com
7170 S.W. 47th St.
Miami, Fl 33155
800-242-4224
Int'l: 305-668-5151
Fax: 305-668-1770
info@underworks.com

Underworks makes a few different products that serve well as binders: the Double Front Compression Shirt (\$29.99), the Tri-Top Chest Binder (\$29.99), and the Power Compression Vest (\$29.99) are all made with 30% spandex and are recommended by Underworks as chest binders. The Double Front Compression Shirt is longer than the Vest and may be tucked into pants to prevent roll-up.

Underworks also makes the Body Shirt (\$17.99) and the Cotton Spandex Support Tank (\$26.99), which are designed to provide support and smooth bulges throughout the upper body. These shirts may be effective for guys with smaller chests, or possibly effective in layering.

Finally, you might want to check out some of the other Underworks products that might aid in achieving a more male-looking physique. They make male girdles that can help tuck in the stomach and reduce the appearance of the hips. They also make a couple of different "posture support" devices that help correct and improve your posture. These might be particularly helpful to FTMs who are post-chest surgery—since many of us spend much of our lives slumping to hide our chests, it can take a while to learn to stand up straight again!

Underworks is FTM-friendly, so don't be afraid to call and ask questions specific to your needs.

Wear-With-All
wear-with-all.com
P.O. Box 8276
Longboat Key, FL 34228
888-808-4888

Wear-With-All's Men's Sleeveless Vest (\$99.99) is made of soft-Lycra spandex with a nylon spandex liner and a front-zip closure. It is designed for compression-wear after surgery, but can be used as a binding device. The full waist length allows you to tuck in the vest to prevent roll-up.

Advanced Bio-Technologies
www.advancedbiotech.com
3100 Bucklin Hill Road, Suite 220
P.O. Box 3099
Silverdale, WA 98383-3099
800-240-8227 toll-free in USA and Canada
360-698-2266
fax: 360-698-2195
info@compressiongarments.net

Advanced Bio-Tech's Male Compression Vest (\$30.00) is made with "soft-flex" spandex and has an adjustable front closure. Look under "products" and "compression garments" in their website.

International Male
www.internationalmale.com
741 F Street
San Diego, CA 92101
800-293-9333
fax: 1-800-757-9997
service@internationalmale.com

International Male features a "shape enhancing" undergarment called the Body Trimmer (\$26.99) that might work reasonably well for small-chested guys. Another design called the Body Shaper is similar, but is very low cut (like a men's tank top) and thus may not be as effective for binding purposes. These products are not specifically designed for gynecomastia.

Underarmour
www.underarmour.com
1020 Hull Street
Baltimore, MD 21230
888-4-ARMOUR

Underarmour makes clothing for athletes. Their clothing is not designed specifically for gynecomastia, though some have found their "compression shirts" to be effective for binding purposes. The material is flexible, breathable and has the added benefit of wicking away sweat, which can make these shirts a good option when exercising, or for wearing underneath other binding methods.

A number of sporting good retail stores carry Underarmour shirts, so you might be able to find a place near you to try them on. Recommended compression shirts are the 0039 Full T-shirt (\$24.99), the 0038 Sleeveless T-shirt (\$23.99), and the 0120 Long Tank (\$24.99). On the Underarmour website, these items are cataloged under "heat gear." Underarmour also has youth sizes if you need something smaller.

Sweat It Out
www.sweatitout.com
Lontex Corporation
8 DeKalb Street
4th Floor
Norristown, PA 19401
800-343-8960
fax: 610-272-5490
sales@sweatitout.com

Sweat it Out is a brand of athletic performance apparel. Their Performance Compression Shirts are available with 2 levels of compression: one with 10% Lycra (low compression), and one with 30% Lycra (maximum compression). The 30% Lycra is the most appropriate for binding, unless you happen to be very small-chested. The maximum Performance Compression shirts contain 70% CoolMax (a fabric that helps wick away moisture and helps keep body temperature from overheating) and 30% Lycra. They come in 3 models: the Performance Compression Sleeveless Shirt (\$49.95), the Performance Compression Short Sleeve Shirt (\$55.95), and the Performance Compression Long Sleeve Shirt (\$59.95).

Like Underarmour, the material in these shirts is flexible, breathable and has the added benefit of wicking away sweat.

Products Designed Specifically for FTM Binding

T-Kingdom
www.t-kingdom.com
No.6 Alley 1 Lane 52 CHUNG-HSING Street
YUNG-HO CITY, TAIPEI COUNTY 234, TAIWAN
Telephone: +886-955-580-595
service@t-kingdom.com

The T-Kingdom company of Taiwan sells several different styles of binding solutions that are specifically designed for FTMs and other female-bodied people who are trying to flatten their chests. They

feature a design that fits like a long shirt and can be tucked into your pants, a medium length shirt design that comes down to the waist, and a design that fits more like a sports bra. The prices range from about \$25-\$60 U.S. dollars (be sure to check the exchange rate when calculating prices). The website has tips for first time buyers on which binder to purchase, ranking them based on binding effect, durability, comfort, and appearance.

APPENDIX: DETERMINING BRA AND CUP SIZE

Perhaps ironically, it can sometimes be helpful to know your bra and cup size when comparing notes with other FTMs on binding solutions, or when speaking to a store like Title 9 Sports when ordering an item such as the Frog Bra. However, many of us have never known this information. Described below is an easy way to calculate your bra and cup size should you need this information for binding.

To determine your bra and cup size, you'll need two measurements: your frame size and your frame + breast size.

Frame size

Your frame 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 most 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). 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.