

## Title:

What is a Corset?

## Word Count:

458

## Summary:

A corset is an item of clothing worn to help shape the upper body into a desired shape for aesthetic, or sometimes orthopaedic, reasons (either while wearing it, or for more permanent results). Men and women have both worn and still wear corsets.

## Keywords:

corset, corsets

## Article Body:

A corset is an item of clothing worn to help shape the upper body into a desired shape for aesthetic, or sometimes orthopaedic, reasons (either while wearing it, or for more permanent results). Men and women have both worn and still wear corsets.

The craft of making corsets is known as corsetry, as is the general wearing of them. A person who designs and makes corsets is a corsetier (for a man) or corsetière (for a woman), or simply a corsetmaker.

The most popular use of corsets is to shape the body into a beautiful, fashionable silhouette shape. For women this usually emphasises a curvy figure, by reducing the waist, and thereby exaggerating the bust and hips. However corsets have also been worn to achieve a more tubular shape although this is less common.

For men, corsets are more customarily used to slim the figure. However, there was a period from around 1820 to 1835 when an hourglass figure was also desirable for men; this was sometimes achieved by wearing a corset.

Corsets are constructed of flexible materials such as satin, leather, pvc, denim, and velvet. They are stiffened with boning (also called ribs or stays) inserted into channels in the material. Steel and whalebone were favored in the Victorian period but plastic is now the most commonly used material. Steel is used for high-quality corsets. Other materials that have been used for boning include ivory, wood, and cane. (A girdle is usually made of elasticised fabric,

not boning.)

A corset encloses the upper body, usually from under the arms to the hips. Some corsets however extend over the hips and may even reach the knees. A shorter kind of corset, which covers the waist area (from below the ribs to just above the hips), is called a 'waist cincher' or underbust corset. A corset may also include garters to hold up stockings.

Corsets are held together by lacing, usually at the back. Tightening or loosening the lacing changes the firmness of the corset. It is possible for a back-laced corset-wearer to do his or her own lacing, though it can be difficult. However, many corsets also have a buttoned or hooked front opening. Once the lacing is adjusted comfortably, it is possible to leave the lacing as adjusted and take the corset on and off using the front opening. This method is incompatible with tightlacing, which strives for the maximum reduction of the waist. Tightlacers are usually laced by spouses and partners.

In the past, a woman's corset was usually worn over a garment called a chemise or shift, a sleeveless low-necked gown made of washable material (usually cotton or linen). These absorbed perspiration and kept the corset clean. Now an undershirt or corset liner is usually worn.