



OUR WRITER
TESTING
CADENSHAE'S
EVOLVE BRA

Choosing the Right Sports Bra for Pregnancy and Breastfeeding

BY HEATHER MAYER IRVINE

HALFWAY THROUGH HER first pregnancy, *Runner's World* contributing editor Bette Canter no longer fit into her regular sports bras. Even with bra clip extenders, the band squeezed uncomfortably on her rib cage—running seemed like a chore and pushing the pace wasn't an option. At least until she could find a sports bra that worked with her growing body.

While a bump visibly signals a baby on the way, pregnant runners experience a host of bodily changes well before the bump emerges, explains Lauren Garges, PT, WCS, a physical therapist certified in women's health (and an *RW* shoe tester).

"Before the uterus starts to enlarge [at about 12 weeks], the rib cage starts to flare upward and outward to make room," Garges, a runner and mom of two, says. "That's going to affect the [bra] band size."

Oxygen consumption increases by 20 percent during pregnancy, requiring more room for the lungs to expand. And then, breasts swell to prepare for breastfeeding. →



→ “Every pregnancy is different,” says Nikki Jones of Cadenshae, a maternity activewear company that sponsors Olympian Alysia Montano. “Some mothers don’t change a lot and they can wear the same bras throughout pregnancy, and others can change two to three cup sizes. In the end stages, breasts are much heavier, and [finding the right] support is a big factor in choosing a bra.”

Canter, for example, went from a 34C to a 36D, relying heavily on bra clip extenders and a lot of maternity sports bra samples to test. By the end of her pregnancy, she walked regularly in the now discontinued Kindred Bravely High Support Maternity and Postpartum Sports Bra, which was wire-free and had easily adjustable “ladder” straps.

When choosing a sports bra to support your physical activity during pregnancy—even if you’ve switched from running to something lower impact—Garges recommends one that has soft, forgiving material in the cups and band to allow for stretching. Activewear companies like Cadenshae design their bras to accommodate this change, with adjustable straps, bands, and bra clip extenders, Jones says. Bras, maternity or otherwise, shouldn’t squeeze the chest or breasts to the point of discomfort, but your breasts should feel supported, Garges says.

Often, maternity bras double as nursing bras for moms who choose to breastfeed. While rib cages usually return to normal, breast size can still be larger than pre-pregnancy during breastfeeding, Jones says. “When milk comes in, there’s a lot of engorgement and heaviness,” she says. “It’s important to provide support to keep the breasts off the chest, particularly to avoid mastitis (a painful infection from a clogged milk duct).” Choosing a wire-free bra can also help decrease that risk.

Over the course of several months, four testers, in varying stages of pregnancy and activity level, tried nearly a dozen maternity sports bras. **Here are the ones that topped the charts.**



For a more adjustable option, try **Cadenshae’s Evolve Bra (\$55, previous page)**, which provides a racerback plus adjustable clasp closure with extenders. The pads are built-in, which means they’re not going anywhere during running or washing.

▲ **CADENSHAE BREASTFEEDING SPORTS BRA SMOOTHIE CROP / \$55**

Cadenshae made a name for itself as a maternity activewear company when it signed Montano, who raced on the world stage while eight months pregnant. Its Smoothie Crop bra was deemed number one by Candice Silvestre, a tester in her third trimester (size medium).

“This bra has the best blend of comfort, form, and function,” she said. “The bra is supportive during runs, and the nursing features are ideal—not too much, not too little, with a simple clasp for easy access.” While the pads are removable, she noted that they stay put during washing.

PROS

- Versatile for running, weight-lifting, and swimming
- Pads don’t move during washing
- Simple design

CONS

- Racerback style only, which might mean less support
- Band does not adjust for expanding rib cage

▲ **NIKE DRI-FIT (M) SWOOSH WOMEN’S MEDIUM-SUPPORT PADDED SPORTS BRA (MATERNITY) / \$55**

Nike launched its maternity collection about two years ago, long-awaited by many runners. The maternity-nursing bra features a sliding adjuster on the band, which, for some, can be challenging to get just right. Canter appreciated how accommodating the material was as her rib cage expanded and her breasts grew.

Unlike most nursing bras, this one doesn’t have a clip above each cup; you have to move the material to the side for access, making breastfeeding more convenient and discreet. Your best bet for this bra is low-impact activities.

PROS

- Some may prefer the clipless nursing access
- Adjustable band for rib cage expansion

CONS

- Minimal support
- Sliding adjuster can be difficult to use
- Crossover style creates folding and gapping

▼ SENITA GO WITH THE FLOW NURSING BRA / \$37

This high-quality bra is designed for medium-impact, but Canter still found it supportive on her runs. The racerback plus double hook-and-eye closure reduce bounce during activity and make the bra easily adjustable as the rib cage and chest expand. A phone-size pocket is nestled between the shoulders—a bra feature that’s becoming more common. While the bra didn’t provide a “locked-in” feeling like Canter’s non-maternity sports bra, it did the trick for lower-impact activities.

For runners who are breastfeeding, the quick-release clasps provide easy nursing access—although the hole may be a little too small for seamless feeding. It scored bonus points for the punny name.

PROS

- Comfortable and supportive
- Phone pocket
- Adjustable for a range of chest sizes

CONS

- Removable cups get bunched in washing machines
- Clasp rubs while running

▼ SWEAT AND MILK VENICE HIGH-IMPACT FULL-COVERAGE NURSING SPORTS BRA / \$59

During the final weeks of pregnancy, Canter found success with this bra, thanks to its open back with adjustable criss-crossing straps and flexible band. In fact, the company touts a “wide” chest band for high-impact support.

“I sized-up to fit my rib cage, and then I was able to tighten the straps and create a good fit for the cups,” she said. “It’s a winner in my eyes.”

The adjustable shoulder straps are designed to accommodate hourly changes in the breasts due to breastfeeding.

The bra runs a size bigger compared to other sports bra brands, which emphasizes the importance of properly measuring yourself before purchasing.

PROS

- High-impact support for larger chests
- Plenty of adjustability
- Full coverage

CONS

- Choosing the right size can be a challenge



BELT IT OUT

These maternity belts provide support while on the move.

Not all moms-to-be will need a maternity support belt; many can move without discomfort, Garges says. But as the uterus grows, the center of gravity shifts, pulling everything forward. That affects posture and can cause excessive pressure above the pubic bone, Garges explains.

A maternity support belt lifts the belly, relieving that pressure.

In order for belts to be effective, it’s important to follow the measuring instructions and purchase the right size.

“People often don’t wear the belt low enough, and the belt shifts up and over the belly button,” Garges says. A properly fitted and secured belt will feel like a hug around the lower abdomen and back, and it will instantly lessen pressure.

A belt can help prepare your body for postpartum recovery, too, including postpartum running, Garges says. “Do what you can to alleviate pain and drastic posture changes.”

1 / BELLY BANDIT UPSIE BELLY / \$70 This support belt is basically a demi cup for your bump. It helped one tester run until 13 days before her daughter was born—thanks to its lightweight design and adjustability. The back pocket can house a hot/cold pack to relieve lower back pain. The downside, like all belts in the late stages of pregnancy, is that it pushes on the bladder during movement.

2 / ANITA BABYSHERPA PREGNANCY GIRDLE / \$30 Unlike the Upsie Belly, this belt is just an adjustable band without a back pocket. Tester Candice Silvestre isn’t usually a fan of belts—she said this one caused some cramping after wearing it—but she said it was easy to use, with high-quality material. Another tester, Cassandra Ryan, in her third trimester, said the belt was supportive and comfortable even in a sitting position.

