Zoah's BINDING GUIDE





ZOAH'S BINDING GUIDE

FOREWORD

After a year spent working with the trans masc community to really understand what they want from their under armour - Zoah's new chest binder is here!

A binder that provides maximum compression combined with sweat-wicking capability designed specifically to meet the needs of trans people on testosterone, for avid gym goers who are no stranger to excessive sweating and for neurodivergent people, for when texture and temperature are key to minimising sensory overload. The binder is specifically designed with durability and comfort in mind, so that you can feel comfortable while feeling contained.



WEARING A BINDER

Navigating chest binding is a complex practice. We have to factor in a variety of things, from picking the right size binder, to making sure we can move safely in it, all while feeling secure that it's performing its function of compressing the chest well enough for us to not have to worry about looking down - or having to re-adjust ourselves during our busy day.

Despite the challenges that come with the practice, we know that for those that bind, doing so is a key part of their self-expression, and that the item is an essential piece of armour in the trans masculine wardrobe!

So we worked with the community, listening to feedback and learning about previous binding experiences, to create a binder that gives you that ultra flat look while also being versatile with what you wear!

We also know that accessing credible information about safe binding at the start of your journey and from those with first hand experience, is vital - so we created this guide to help.

Whether you are brand new to binding or a seasoned expert looking for inspiration, our guide features a blend of practical and creative tips for body safety and self-care strategies, that you can adopt when wearing the Zoah chest binder. We feature voices from the trans community that we worked with directly, insights from a medical professional and self expression tips to elevate feelings of gender euphoria.

Take note of the information that resonates with you the most, write reminders for yourself, share the information with friends and reflect back to this guide whenever you need it for your binding journey.

Ready to learn more? Let's get into it!



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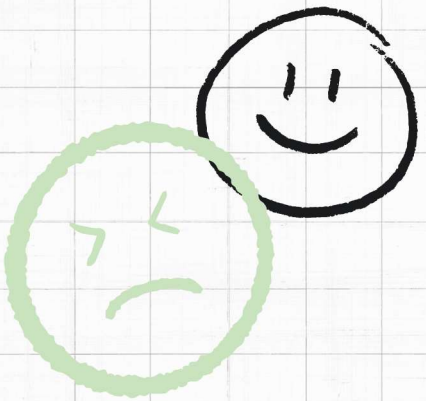
Community Voices
-Max Siegel, Sam Moir Smith + more share what binding means to them

Self Expression & Emotional Well-Being
-Feeling good in your binder
-Seasonal Considerations
-DIY inspiration

CONTENT NOTE:

This guide features medical terminology and may use anatomical terms to describe bodies. The topics will cover themes such as gender dysphoria and hormone replacement therapy (HRT). The term trans+ in this guide covers all those for whom binding is a key part of their gender expression.

How Safe Is It?



AN INTRODUCTION TO BINDING

Chest binding is a safe practice when approached correctly. Treat your body like a temple, even on those bad dysphoria days. Listen to what your body needs, make sure you make time for intentional breath work and invest in a quality chest binder that prioritises your health and makes you feel like the best version of you (it's Zoah of course).

We have listened to the community and created binders of the highest quality that are safe for long-term use. However, binding safety is not limited to the design alone, how you wear it is just as important. So, we are here to walk you through some self care rituals to encourage you to take care of your body while binding, something which will make all the difference.

Some go-to tips for making sure you are binding safely:



Make sure your binder fits properly:

Zoah binders are true to size, which is why the measuring process is so important (we will come on to that shortly).If you are between sizes, measure up to ensure you have sufficient space around the ribs. We recommend against sizing down which can negatively impact your breathing.

Take care when exercising:

We know that for trans guys and non-binary masculine presenting folk, being able to bind while exercising can be liberating. This is why the Zoah binder has been developed with a sweat-wicking layer to draw moisture away from the body, while also putting comfort front and centre.

Take care of your skin:

Moisturise your skin on a daily basis to prevent friction and any chafing.

Massage and stretch:

Before and after wearing your chest binder, massage your chest and shoulder muscles and practise deep stretching to reduce muscle spasms, to increase circulation and to repair and nurture muscle tissues.



Binder hygiene:

This one is less talked about but it's very important to keep your binder clean. This will help stave off skin irritations and infection on the areas of skin with which the binder comes into contact. It will also help the breathable fabric to keep doing its job!



Stay hydrated:

Drinking water maintains moisture in your airways and improves breathing. It also helps to reduce fatigue and it improves circulation. Keep a water bottle with you for those extra long days when wearing your chest binder.

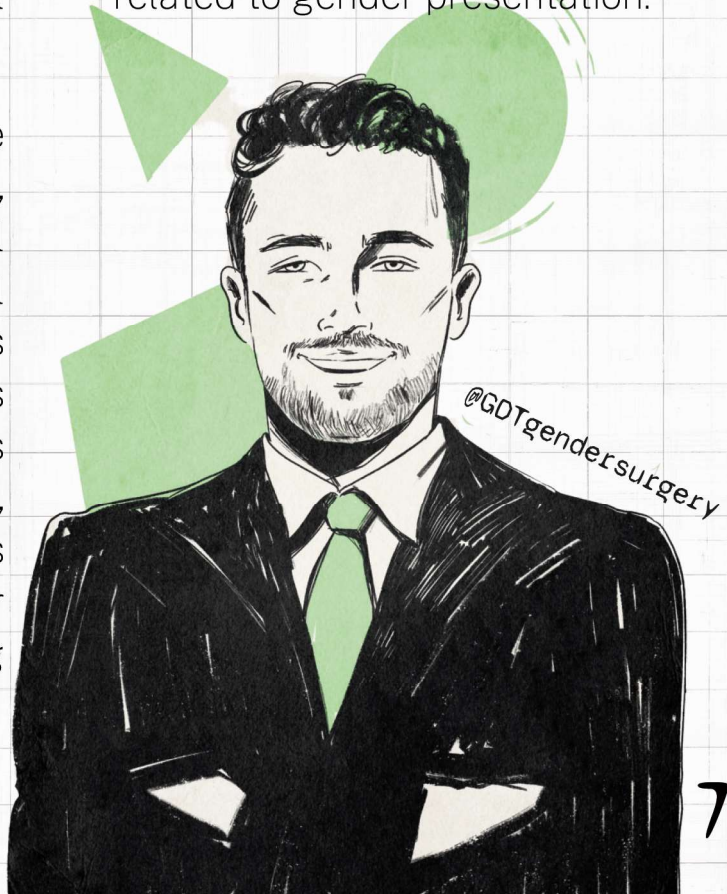
INSIGHTS FROM A MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL

We invited Dr. Giuseppe Di Taranto, who specialises in gender affirming surgeries, to share some insights on safe binding practise:

Chest binding is a common practice among transmasculine and non-binary individuals. Binding involves wearing compression garments to flatten the chest, and while it can offer significant psychological benefits, it also comes with potential physical health risks.

Current evidence on the practice, though limited, highlights both its mental health benefits and physical risks, as well as considerations for safe use. Research has proven that binding helps reduce gender dysphoria, especially for those patients who have started their transition and are considering top surgery.

It reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression in transgender and non-binary people, contributing positively to overall mental health and emotional well-being. Binding also improves social functioning by reducing stress related to gender presentation.



THERE ARE ALSO RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH BINDING:

- Respiratory and musculoskeletal symptoms: Common physical side effects include shortness of breath, back pain, chest pain, and rib pain.

- Skin irritation and soft tissue injuries: Binding can lead to skin irritation, rashes, and infections, especially when done for prolonged periods or with inadequate materials. Soft tissue damage may occur due to prolonged or excessive pressure on the chest.

- Rib fractures and deformities: In extreme cases, improper binding techniques or wearing binders too tightly can cause rib fractures or deformities, though these are less common.

YOUR BODY WILL TELL YOU WHEN IT'S TIME TO REMOVE YOUR BINDER. PAY ATTENTION TO THESE IMPORTANT SIGNALS:

- Breathing changes are your first warning sign. If you experience shortness of breath or find yourself taking shallow breaths, remove your binder immediately.

- Sharp or persistent pain, especially in your ribs, back, or shoulders, indicates you need a break from binding.

- Watch your skin for signs of trouble. Persistent redness that doesn't fade quickly, rashes, or unusual bruising means you need to adjust your binding practice.

- Any numbness or tingling in your arms or chest area requires immediate attention.

IF YOU'RE PLANNING ON HAVING TOP SURGERY, YOUR BINDING HISTORY MATTERS SIGNIFICANTLY.

Most surgeons recommend stopping binding 2-4 weeks before surgery, though this varies by procedure and individual circumstances. Long-term binding can affect skin elasticity and tissue quality, which may influence surgical approaches and outcomes. Be upfront with your surgeon about your binding practices and any complications you've experienced. This information helps create the most effective surgical plan for your body.



The most successful binding practices are those that balance physical comfort, safety, and personal goals.

HERE ARE A FEW TIPS:

-Limit binding duration: Evidence suggests that binding for extended periods, especially over eight hours, increases the likelihood of adverse symptoms. Shorter periods and regular breaks are advised.

-Use safe binding materials: Professionally-made binders are recommended over DIY methods (such as elastic bandages or tape), as these can cause increased physical harm.

-Take regular medical check-ups: Regularly consulting healthcare professionals, especially if pain or other concerning symptoms develop, can help manage any physical side effects and provide guidance on safer binding practices.

WHY ZOAH?

We have undergone a long process of research and development to design a binder that factors in the challenges that those who bind face. We have listened to the community and worked with trans+ people from an array of backgrounds to ensure that our binders are empowering.

For trans masculine people on testosterone, sweating increases drastically, so our chest binders have been developed using sweat wicking microfibre, that helps to keep you dry throughout the day. The fabric also helps to reduce heat buildup and improves airflow, making it easier to breathe.

There's nothing worse than having to wear a damp binder. For neurodivergent people, our chest binder minimises sensory overload. The sweat wicking microfibre keeps your binder dry; the binder has reinforced seams to prevent wear and tear and to provide a smooth sensory experience with no ridges digging into the skin.

HOW DO I KNOW WHICH BINDER IS RIGHT FOR ME?

There's lots to factor in when choosing a binder. Let's start with our two designs that can functionally serve different needs, or it can be just down to an aesthetic choice.

THE SHORT BINDER

People with a smaller chest size usually opt for the short binder. Why? Because there is less tissue to have to fill the surface area of the chest binder. If you have a smaller chest size, you are less prone to 'spillage' which happens when chest tissue shows at the base of the binder hem, or spills out over the armpit seam.

Stylistically speaking, if you are a trans masculine person with a penchant for crop tops (who isn't?), then opting for a short binder means that it will less likely be seen. Overall, short binders are more versatile when it comes to choosing what you wear with it.

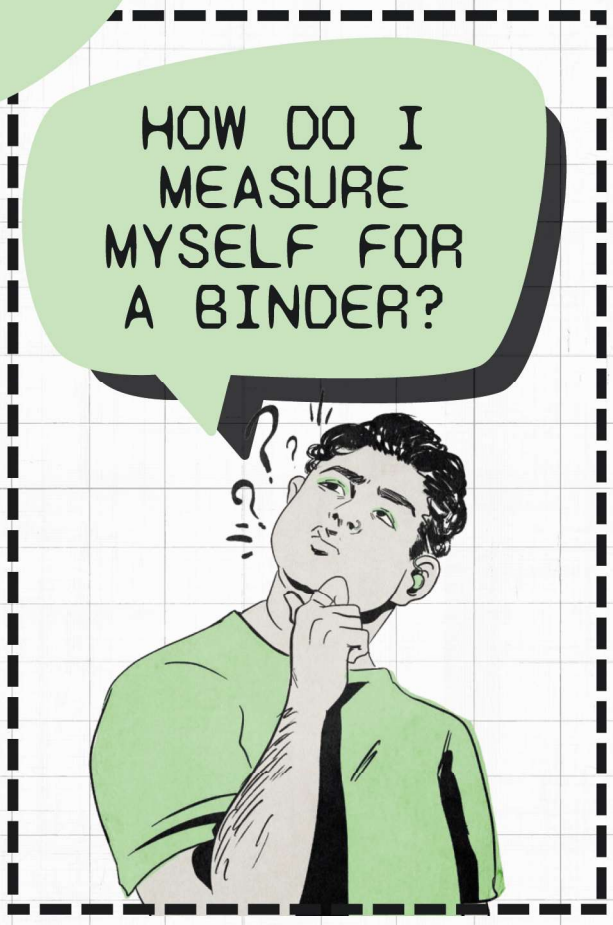
For neurodivergent people, the short binder might be best for keeping fabric friction away from the belt-line and to keep your outfits more 'breathable'. On the other hand there are reasons why neurodivergent folks might opt for the long binder too.



THE LONG BINDER

For trans people with larger chests, sometimes a long binder works better. That's because there is more room to distribute chess tissue. If you have added hip dysphoria, wearing a long binder can help with feeling more compressed in the mid section.

Some neurodivergent people find the long binder works better for them because it can be tucked into trousers adding an extra feeling of security to the layers that follow.



Before you get into measuring yourself make sure you have a few items handy:

- a soft measuring tape usually used in sewing
- a notepad and a pen
- a friend to help if they are available!

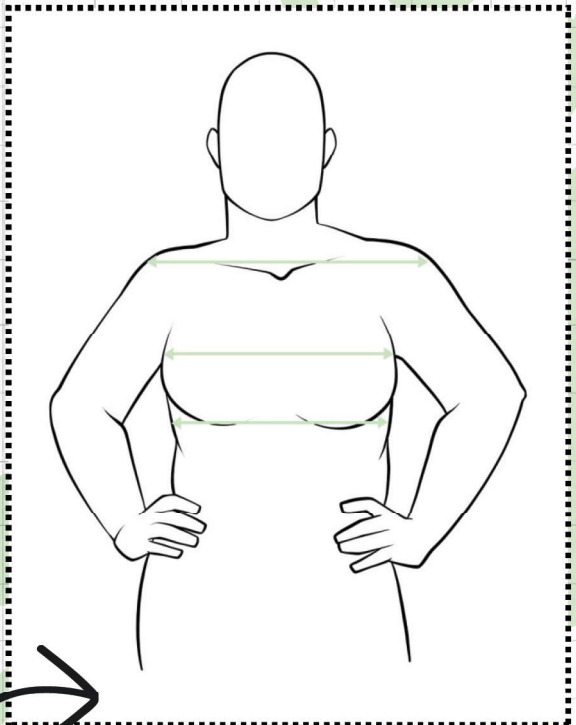
Tip: wear minimal clothing when measuring yourself. Make sure that you aren't binding already! If you need to wear something, opt for a loose shirt with nothing underneath.

There are 3 main measurements you should take note of:

1. Shoulder Span: end of right shoulder to end of left shoulder across your back.
- Try to keep your shoulders relaxed/not hunched over.

2. Upper Chest: The circumference around your chest with the measuring tape resting in the center of your chest where the most chest tissue is.
- Take the measurement in the center of your chest.

3. Under Chest: Measure the lower part of your torso under your chest tissue and where your ribcage starts to end. (use the same technique as step 2).

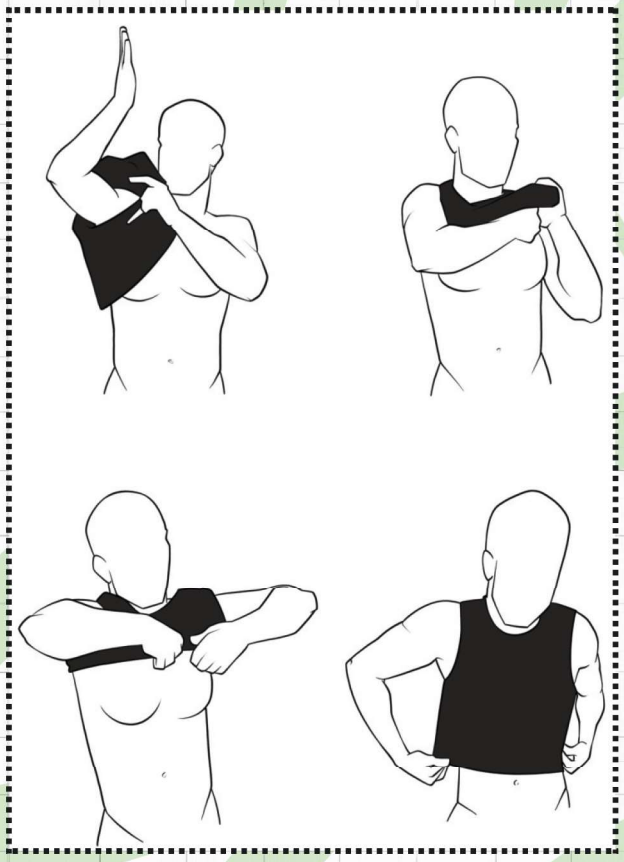


WEARING A BINDER

How to put a binder on

Feed your head through the neck first, then feed each arm one at a time into the arm holes. The fabric will be bunched up at the top of the chest. Roll the fabric down over your chest.

Rearrange your chest tissue so it lies flat and off center of your chest. For example, move your tissue downwards and slightly towards each armpit.



How to take a binder off

Take one arm out at a time, gently, and then pull the binder off over your head in one quick motion. Try and pull the front of the fabric on the chest slightly forward to allow some room for your arms to manoeuvre.

A binder should be comfortably hugging your body. You should feel free to move, and to be able to take big deep breaths in it.

COMMUNITY VOICES

Santi Babi - “Binding has given me the freedom to experiment with my fluid sense of self expression and to figure out what felt right when I was figuring out who I was and what felt comfortable to me as a genderqueer trans person. Being able to readily craft myself a flat chest, having autonomy with how I present in the world - and the way that others perceive me too has given me such gender euphoria”.

Griffin - “I think the first thing most trans masc people do is get a binder, and it's a very monumental thing being able to look at yourself in the mirror and feel more connected to your own body and put on your favourite t-shirt and feel happy; I think it builds confidence. Binding was important very early on in my transition. It was the first thing I was drawn towards in terms of exploring my identity. Having my first binder was huge, it helped me feel like my authentic self. Day to day life, going out, even just sitting in the house wearing a binder, made me feel in my own body, and made me feel like my body is my own. Knowing I'm wearing a binder is very, very empowering, and the more I wear it, the more I feel like me.”

Ollie- “Binding to me means an opportunity to re-define, to deconstruct and explore gender expression. Binders are essential to my existence, I have worn a binder almost everyday for the last 3 years. Empowerment and control, self-esteem and confidence, security and grounding, resilience and courage; a binder is a very significant gender affirming tool that allows me to disengage from psychological distress enough to maintain a functional life. My binder allows me to move confidently and purposefully through the world in a way which is authentic to me!”

Sam Moir Smith- More than anything, binding gave me a sense of control over my body and the way it was perceived by others. During a time that felt so powerless and disjointed, binding allowed me to look in the mirror and feel some sort of recognition with the way my body appeared to me. It made my life that little bit easier.

Max Siegel-The first time I put on a binder was a game changing moment for me. Looking in the mirror was the first time I remember feeling that jolt of “that’s me”, a kind of recognition of who I could be or was all along without realising. From then on it became the opening up of a world I didn’t know existed for me, it began my journey to becoming Max, to exploring our amazing community and eventually to having top surgery. As well as the emotional side, physically it became an armour, especially before top surgery or hormones it allowed me to move through the world with a little more safety and a little more confidence.

> “Within the community, people speak of the masculine urge to wear a white vest. I didn’t understand this until I first wore a binder. The way a white vest sits flat on the chest gives me such a strong sense of euphoria, and that feeling wouldn’t have been possible without binding. Binding allowed me to not only look in the mirror, but experiment with clothing, and, most importantly, free up my mind from the perils of worrying about being perceived and misgendered. The community will always support each other in grassroots ways so that everyone can access safe binding, but I’m excited that Zoah are taking the time, care and effort to create a binder which truly centres the needs of us masculine folk.”

SELF EXPRESSION AND EMOTIONAL WELL BEING

When we speak about binder safety we often think about the physical implications of binding. But binding also plays an important role in wellbeing and provides a feeling of emotional comfort and ease in your body and the clothes that you wear. There's nothing like seeing yourself with a flat chest and feeling ready to get dressed in your favourite clothes knowing your shirts will sit perfectly.
Get out to those social events, partake in your favourite activities and feel confident in the work place!

Zoah binders come in two colours black and white and range from sizes XS-XXL. The basic colour options means they can easily blend in or camouflage with your shirts so they go unnoticed.

If you want to be bold with our chest binders, you can also wear them as a featured part of your outfit. Customise your binder, have fun with it and use it to celebrate trans joy.

NEED CREATIVE IDEAS TO STYLE YOUR BINDER? HERE ARE A FEW:

- Wear your binder underneath a fancy open button up
- Embroider a design on your binder
- Attach badges or pins to your binder and wear it as a tank with baggy jeans
- Consider tailoring your binder if you need a different fit: take it in with a hand stitch or expand parts of it with patterned fabric.



LOOKING FOR WAYS TO INCORPORATE YOUR CHEST BINDER LOOK, AS PART OF YOUR OUTFIT?

Try using the white binder under shirts wearing it like an undervest.

The black binder can blend in well with dark button ups (with one button down)

The long binder can be seen as an undershirt and it can work if you want to rock the sports goth look by pairing your binder with dark coloured activewear!

THREE WAYS TO STYLE YOUR CLOTHES SO YOU LOOK ULTRA FLAT:

1. Wear layers: thicker knits, tops with big logos or hoodies work well.
2. Accessories can distract from the chest area: opt for a suit tie, scarves and a cross body bag.
3. Opt for busy patterns and dark colours: dark green plaid, black and white checks, a dark burgundy shirt with paisley are just some ideas. Patterns distract from the area and dark colours can help to hide any unwanted shape or definition.

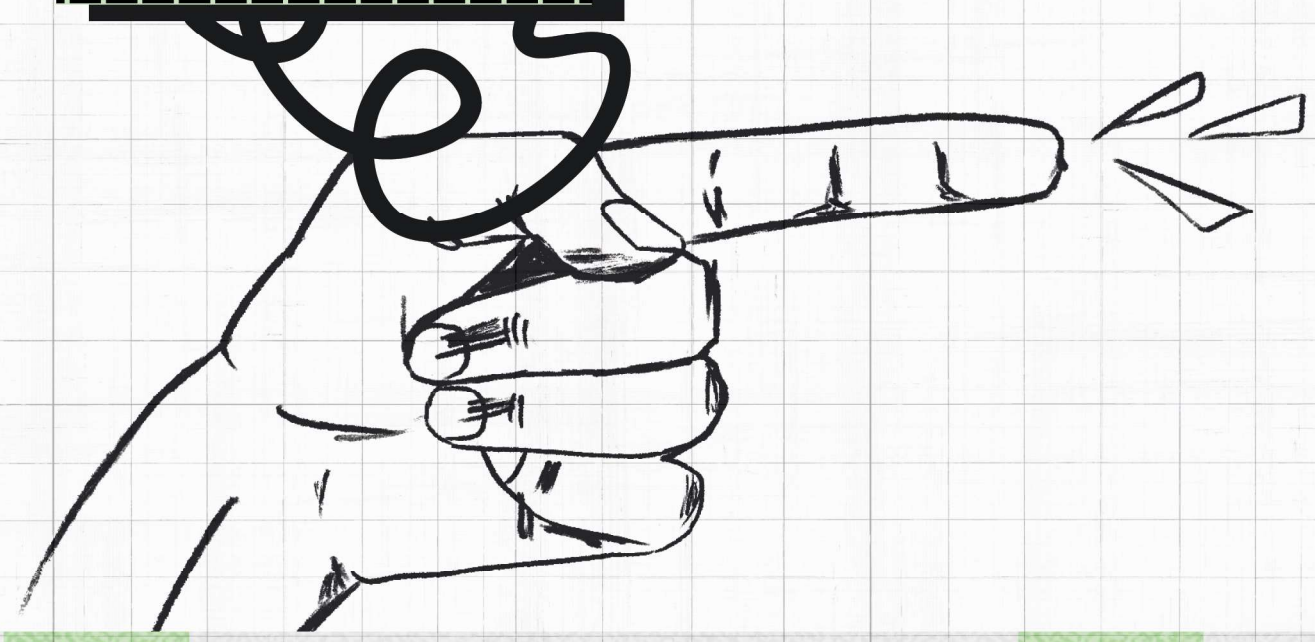


Binding is about reclaiming your body and expressing your identity in a way that feels true to you. Your binding journey should be about what makes you feel comfortable and affirmed and Zoah is here to make that happen.

Have more burning questions?
Check out our FAQs.

WHERE CAN I FIND BINDER STYLING INSPIRATION?

-Reddit
-Tumblr
-Tik Tok
-Point of Pride
-Qwear
-FB groups
-Pinterest



ZOAH BINDING GUIDE-FAQS

What type of binder is best for me?

It is all about personal choice and what feels right for you. However, one rule of thumb is that individuals with a smaller chest size often opt for a short binder, because there is less tissue to fill the surface area of the binder. Shorter binders are also sometimes seen as more versatile for different clothing choices (e.g. crop tops) and more breathable as the stomach isn't covered. For those with larger chests, a longer binder can be a good option as there is more room for the chest tissue to be distributed.

Is binding safe and how do I properly wear a binder?

Chest binding is a safe practice when approached carefully and correctly. There are a few tips for taking care of yourself whilst binding; evidence suggests that regular breaks should be taken, and binders should be worn for no longer than eight hours at a time. Listen to your body, stay connected to your breathing and invest in a quality chest binder that prioritises you and your health.

What should I consider/look out for when selecting a binder size?

Zoah binders are true to size but if you are in between sizes, we always recommend that you size up, never down.

Can I bind while exercising or doing physical activity?

We understand the importance of feeling comfortable while exercising, and that trans+ people often shy away from sports due to gender dysphoria. If you want to wear a binder when engaging in physical activities like running, swimming or weightlifting, you can do so responsibly by opting for one size up from the binder you usually wear, taking regular breaks (both from the activity and from binding) and drinking plenty of water.

I am prone to overheating, can I still bind?

Zoah binders have been developed with built in sweat-wicking properties to help counter the effects of testosterone which can cause excessive sweating, which is exacerbated when exercising.

How can I deal with irritation of my skin while binding?

Binding involves the compression of chest tissue which can sometimes cause discomfort of the skin, such as soreness, chafing, rashes or redness, especially when done for prolonged periods or with substandard materials. We recommend moisturising the skin daily, choosing a well-made binder from a reputable manufacturer and keeping your binder nice and clean by handwashing it regularly.

Can binding cause permanent damage?

Physical side effects of excessive binding can include back pain, chest pain and rib pain. The practice can also affect skin elasticity and tissue quality. In extreme cases, improper binding techniques or wearing binders that are too tight can cause rib fractures or deformities, though these are less common. To help prevent side effects: massage your chest and shoulders before and after wearing your binder, carry out deep stretching, stay hydrated, take regular breaks, and make sure you are wearing the correct size binder.

What are signs that I should stop binding?

Breathing changes are your first warning sign. If you are short of breath when wearing your binder, stop what you are doing and remove the garment, breathe deeply and drink plenty of water. Sharp or persistent pain, especially in your ribs, back, or shoulders, indicates you need a break from binding. It is important to measure yourself and select the right size binder, sizing up if you are between sizes. Keep an eye out for any changes in your body and consult with a doctor if you are worried.

What should I do if I can't afford a binder?

If finances are a barrier to accessing a binder, check out G(end)er Swap, an LGBTQ+ outreach organisation that supports trans+ people to access style resources. One of their initiatives includes access to second hand chest binders on some of their platforms. Visit their website or socials for more information.

What are alternatives to binding?

If you are opting not to bind, but are still interested in concealing your chest as much as possible, here are some tips:

- wear t-shirts of a thicker fabric and with a boxy fit,
- opt for busy patterns and dark fabrics,
- layer up clothing,
- select thicker knitted jumpers,
- choose cardigans, hoodies, tops with big logos
- accessorise with ties, scarfs and cross body bags



ABOUT THE WRITER:

Santi, is the Founder and Creative Director of G(end)er Swap - the UK's first style outreach organisation that supports trans and gender-diverse people to access clothes and community via style workshops, pop-ups and digital style resources. Santi is a DIY creative, performer and public speaker.

INSTAGRAM: @santibabi @genderswap_

WEBSITE: https://santisorrenti.com

https://genderswap.org/

ABOUT THE ARTIST:

Giulia Renzi is an illustrator, graphic designer and comic book artist, passionate about videogames, horror movies and punk music. When possible, she loves to collaborate with a number of LGBTQIA+ associations especially in southern Italy, where she lives.

INSTAGRAM: @_grenzi_

WEBSITE: https://giuliarenzi.carbonmade.com/

ABOUT Zoah

Zoah is an inclusive underwear brand, which was launched by entrepreneur, Danielle St James, in 2021 to address the unique needs of trans feminine people. The original products were conceived based on St James' own experiences, but she had long aspired to expand her range to provide options for all trans+ people. In 2023 St James was awarded a grant by Innovate UK, the UK's innovation agency, as part of a competitive process. The grant funded a 12 month project, which ended in November 2024 and which resulted in the development of two products created in close collaboration with the trans masculine and AFAB non-binary community.

Visit www.zoah.shop to learn more about the Zoah range.

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