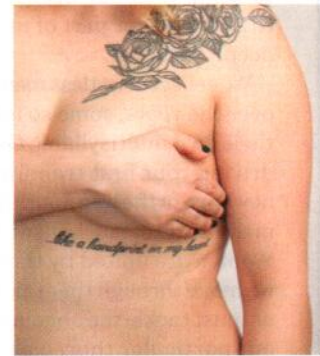
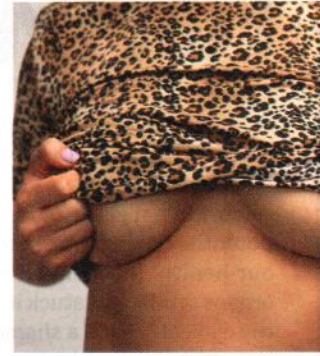


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**BREASTS**  
 AN OWNER'S MANUAL  
 \* \* \*  
 They're not just a source of lurid  
 fascination or life-threatening  
 disease. We explore the complex,  
 consuming, sexy, sore and  
 profoundly personal relationship  
 women have with their breasts  
 By **KATIE UNDERWOOD**  
 Illustrations by **LEEANDRA CIANCI**  
 Photographs by **MAY TRUONG**





♡♡  
**THANKS  
 FOR THE  
 MAMMARIES**

If you've carted a pair of breasts around for most of your life, you'll know that they are much more than Instagram gold for "empowered" celebrities, shelves for expensive lingerie or a potential ticking time bomb when it comes to our health. But conversations about these organs tend to get stuck in either the sexual or the clinical. That's a shame, because our relationship with our breasts—probably more than any other part of us—is so charged and deeply personal.

We collect countless memories of our breasts over the years, some so intense they deserve their own multisyllabic German phrase: test driving your first training bra; nursing your newborn in the wee hours of her life; eyeing the mammogram machine with cold antagonism. Women are united by these experiences, but we move through them alone. And each one of us must tackle the ongoing work of embracing our particular thoracic inheritance. Maybe you've not quite made peace with your wonky right nipple or your too-dark areolas or your mastectomy scars. Perhaps you've given your pair affectionate nicknames, or said "Screw it" and bought yourself new ones. To have breasts is to endlessly navigate the continuum between wishing for them desperately and wishing them away entirely.

We asked six Canadian women to bare their breast-related hang-ups and joys. We were given candid accounts of not being born with breasts, but acquiring them later in life; of what happens when cancer and family history conspire to take them away; of the life-changing magic of bullet bras; and of throwing caution (and nipples) to the wind and forgoing bras entirely. (We also rounded up a collection of cute yet functional bras and straight facts about awkward truths, like nipple hair and major asymmetry.) Whether your breasts are feeding a family, heading south like migratory birds or alerting you to an oncoming cold front, take a good, long look. They're all yours.



**BOOBOLOGY**

**Questions?  
 Get 'em off  
 your chest**

We consulted Dr. Brett Beber, a plastic surgeon at Toronto's Women's College Hospital, as well as a stack of medical textbooks and studies, for the answers



**What are these things, actually?** Here is the scientific (and outrageously unsexy) answer: The breast is essentially a modified sweat gland made up of fatty, glandular and fibrous tissue.

**When do breasts stop growing — if ever?** Your breasts usually stop developing when you're 18 or 19, but thanks to pregnancy, menopause and weight gain or loss, they'll continue to change throughout your lifetime.

**Are they meant to be the same size?** Your breasts are not supposed to be mirror images of each other — think of them as sisters, not twins.

**Are they meant to hurt a whole bunch?** Many women experience breast tenderness right before their period, when progesterone spikes and milk ducts swell. But if the pain is new or affecting your life, give your doctor a shout.

**This lump in my breast is probably nothing, right?** A reassuring stat: It's estimated that between 80 and 85 percent of lumps are benign fibroids or cysts. But, again, let your doc know.

**French researchers claim that wearing a bra contributes to sagging. *Vrai ou faux?*** The idea that you can prevent breast sagging by dispensing with your underwire and exercising your chest muscles (i.e. free-boobing) is a myth. Blame gravity, not your bra — and you can also blame genes. Some breasts drop more than others.

**What else do women get wrong about bras?** We have no idea which ones to wear. According to a survey from lingerie company Triumph International, more than three-quarters of women are in the wrong bra size. We generally tend to overestimate band size and underestimate cup size.

**My bra straps dig into my shoulders. How bad can that be?** Bad enough to cause numbness in your little finger.

**Did I inherit my breasts from my mom?** The genetics of breast size is not completely understood, but it seems that some women take after their mothers, while others take after the women on their father's side.

**Am I flat because I slept on my chest as a child?** No.

**Okay, but since I'm flat, I don't need a sports bra, right?** When you're out jogging, your small breasts can still bounce up and down by more than three inches. So maybe strap them in.

**What's with the hair on my nipples? Can I pluck it?** Hey, humans are mammals and mammals have hair, including around the nipple area. Plucking, waxing and laser hair removal are just as safe on your nipples as anywhere



else on your body — provided they're done properly.

**How come my nipples are itchy?** Eczema can happen during breastfeeding, pregnancy or just due to the changing of the seasons. If the skin on your nipple seems dry or damaged, try lanolin cream or extra-virgin coconut oil.

**What's going on with my nipples during sex?** When you're turned on, your nipples expand, widening a little and lengthening by up to 1 cm.

After you have an orgasm, your nipples will deflate again.

**I don't really like having my nipples touched in bed. Is that strange?** Not according to famed sex researcher Alfred Kinsey, who estimated that half of women did not experience erotic sensitivity in their nipples and breasts.

**I have inverted nipples. Am I alone?** Nope. If you were to round up 100 nipples, most of them will be outies, but 10 to 20 will be innies.

FACT

**450 mL**

Amount of milk that one breast alone can produce during a breastfeeding session



Boob Diaries



CHELSEA'S STORY

"I breastfed not ONE, not FOUR, but SIX children"

I was a modest 32A at my wedding; I went up to a DD bra during pregnancy. But I felt much more in love with my breasts as they were developing, and I appreciate my breasts a lot more now: These puppies are tough. I make incredible milk and tons of it, which is the ace in my back pocket if I ever need to quiet a fussy toddler. My nipples always protruded a bit, but thanks to six kids, they're always out now. My husband measures them in Smarties. And my breasts are still highly functional sexually—even if they're these saggy, empty, stretch-marked pancake-looking-type things. Even if they look like bottle tops.



BRAS

# Support system

Whether you're in the market for some saucy underthings or a comfy workhorse, you'll find it here

SEXY

SOOO COMFY

1. B.Tempt'd by Wacoal B.Active underwire sports bra, \$55, [thebay.com](http://thebay.com).
2. Victoria's Secret purple and green sports bra, \$78, [victoriasecret.com](http://victoriasecret.com).
3. Déesse x Addition Elle Sheer Desire T-ser bra, \$60, [additionelle.com](http://additionelle.com).
4. Ashley Graham x Addition Elle Showstopper balconet bra, \$70, [additionelle.com](http://additionelle.com).
5. La Vie en Rose lavender lace bra, \$40, [lavieenrose.com](http://lavieenrose.com).
6. Cosabella Italia underwire bra, \$91, [cosabella.com](http://cosabella.com).
7. Wacoal Halo lace wire-free bra, \$38, [thebay.com](http://thebay.com).
8. Talula for Aritzia burgundy bralette, \$25, [aritzia.com](http://aritzia.com).
9. Victoria's Secret bralette, \$33, [victoriasecret.com](http://victoriasecret.com).
10. Wonderbra black geometric cami underwire bra, \$43, [thebay.com](http://thebay.com).
11. Déesse x Addition Elle striped seamless bralette, \$40, [additionelle.com](http://additionelle.com).
12. Cosabella Talco thin strap cami, \$67, [cosabella.com](http://cosabella.com).
13. Freya black sports bra, \$92, [freyalingerie.com](http://freyalingerie.com).
14. Anita Maternity Paisley nursing bra, \$80, [anita.com](http://anita.com).

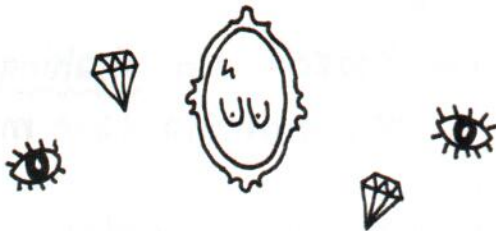




BRIGITTE'S STORY

"I HAVEN'T WORN A BRA IN DECADES."

Growing up in France in the '70s, I convinced myself I was going to have very prominent breasts. They never materialized. When I was 16, I saw a picture of Jane Birkin in a sheer top. I thought she looked really good, really sexy, and she had no bra. And no breasts! So I stopped wearing a bra. Before coming to Canada, I lived in Denmark, where there was no judgment at all—I regularly saw topless women eating lunch in the park. We're more puritan here: Living in Quebec, I felt social pressure to wear a bra, but I couldn't stand the pinching and squeezing. The sagging is bearable, and there's a lot more freedom.



JUDY'S STORY

"AS A TRANS WOMAN, BREASTS HELPED ME FEEL LIKE MYSELF."

Before I had breasts, I felt like my body was viewed as adolescent by my intimate partners. At 29, I had been on hormones for two years, but breast enhancement was a way to make a permanent physical commitment to my transition. Surgery is not a goal for every trans person, but for me, being able to pass as female in public was important for my survival, for my everyday getting along.

I wasn't going for total porn-star boobs—I just wanted a pair that were nice to look at and hold and that fit the rest of my body. I wanted them to

look like I could have grown them myself. My doctor and I decided on round, cohesive silicone gels.

Coming out of any cosmetic procedure, there's a tendency toward a sort of buyer's remorse—like, "What have I done?" "Will people still find me attractive?" "Will I still find my body attractive?" I had to come to terms with my new shape—getting used to cooking with these things in front of me, and having to move my arms differently. But it was exciting. It wasn't like I needed breasts to be female, but now I look at my body and recognize it as my own.



MARCI'S STORY

"Before I lost my breasts, I went shopping for new ones."

Thanks to a high occurrence of familial breast cancer and my own dense tissue, I'll earn my "previvor" badge when I have elective surgery later this year. To help prepare my head and heart for what lies ahead, I attended an event made for women like me. The big draw at Breast Reconstruction Awareness Day (or "BRA Day")—an annual, Canada-wide event designed to educate prospective patients about their post-mastectomy options—is the Show & Tell lounge. It's a private, women-only space in which a handful of generous ladies doff their tops, offering the rest of us a first-hand view of their implants, scars and all. Following a quick introduction and some nervous laughter, the volunteers began undressing. First up was Karen, who whipped off her tank top, took my hand and matter-of-factly placed it on the curve of her chest, asking me whether I could feel the implant. I couldn't, but admittedly, I wasn't pressing very hard. I'm not sure what I was expecting from the evening, but it was refreshingly devoid of survivor platitudes. I was just standing in a room full of beautiful women, discussing the merits of teardrop and round implants. (My surgeon later recommended round due to my small cup size and natural sag.) But more important than what the models were—or weren't—wearing was the undeniable fact that they are doing okay. It made me feel like I might be okay too.

FACT

10%

Share of breast cancer cases that are hereditary



TIMELINE

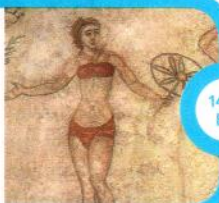
# An abridged history of boobs

2000 BC



Wet nursing — breastfeeding another woman's child — is one of the world's oldest professions.

A bra-like garment, worn by female athletes, is featured on cave drawings from the Minoan civilization.



1400 BC

4 BC



Aphrodite of Knidos, the first life-sized nude sculpture of the female frame, is unveiled in Greece.

Legend has it the champagne coupe is created in the likeness of Marie Antoinette's breast. Cheers!



1770

1962



Timmie Jean Lindsey, a Texan housewife, becomes the first woman to receive silicone breast implants.

Uncensored naked breasts appear for the first time on network television during an episode of the ABC miniseries *Roots*.



1977

2004



Janet Jackson slips a nip during the Super Bowl half-time show; CBS narrowly avoids a whopping \$550,000 fine.

Angelina Jolie brings widespread attention to the BRCA1 gene by revealing that she's undergone a preventive double mastectomy.



2013



PAIGE'S STORY

**"AT 17, I WAS DONE WITH MY 34Js."**

I wanted breasts before I had them, but then I grew into a 34J. Guys would make comments and assume I was promiscuous because I had large boobs. It used to feel like I was carrying two bags of sand — like there was so much weight on my chest. I had a lot of back pain, and when I talked to my mom about the possibility of a

reduction, she thought it was a good idea. She had one too, at 18. Now I'm 18 and a DD. It was a pretty big surgery, and I was a bit sad to downgrade, like a chapter in my life was over. And then I think of the ease of shopping for my prom dress last year — it was long and blue with a sparkly bodice. But it was still pretty boobey.



KELLY'S STORY



**"I'm hooked on shaking what my momma gave me."**

I was in the military for eight years, so my femininity was just decimated. Then I developed a chronic thyroid disease and I fell into a really bad depression. Desperate for some exercise, I thought, "Wouldn't burlesque be kinda fun?" I wanted to challenge my anxieties about my body. In my class, there were women of all sizes. I remember making some joke about my body, and one of the other artists went, "No, no. We don't do that here." I had a chance to shake what my momma gave me, and I was hooked on that feeling. The reveal of your breasts at the end of a performance is very brief, and pasties cover my innie-and-outie nipples, the only part of my body I'm uncomfortable with. Now, when I'm looking for a costume, I think, "What's going to highlight my boobs in the best way?" Bullet bras! 1940s silhouettes! All of a sudden, everything seems to require a sparkle.

FACT

**15 to 23 lb**

Weight of a pair of D-cup breasts

WET NURSING PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS; MINOAN DRAWING: UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP/GETTY IMAGES; APHRODITE OF KNIDOS PHOTO: DE AGOSTINI/GETTY IMAGES; CHAMPAGNE COUPE: ISTOCKPHOTO; SILICONE BREAST PHOTO: MIGUEL MEDINA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES; JACKSON PHOTO: DONALD MIRALLES/GETTY IMAGES; JOLIE PHOTO: JASON LAVERIS/GETTY IMAGES.