

Play Hard!

Choose Activewear for Comfort and Safety

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Activewear has come a long way in the last few years as technology has allowed for the creation of new fibers, fabrics and finishes. Selecting the right type of activewear for a specific sport or exercise adds to the comfort as well as safety of the wearer.

Brand-name activewear, including Under Armour, Nike and Adidas, is popular with teens and adults. Private-label brands available in department and discount stores might be made of similar materials but cost less than the national brands. Most activewear is made from durable fabrics that can be laundered frequently and still provide long wear. Since most are knit fabrics that stretch, fit is not much of a problem, adding to the wear life of the garments. Children and teens often wear activewear for school and leisure activities because comfort is important to them. Clothing that is worn often can be worth a higher price tag.

Here are some tips on what is available in the marketplace and how to shop:

For aerobic activity: Choose clothing made of breathable materials designed to wick moisture away from your body and dry quickly. This is especially important for the clothing that will be in direct

contact with your skin and for exercising outdoors. Cotton shirts, shorts and sweatpants can weigh you down with the extra moisture they absorb. Runners especially want to select fitness wear that is lightweight and able to keep them cool or warm, depending on the climate conditions.

For yoga: Look into fitness wear that will not hinder your movements. Clothing that is designed for yoga is also a very good option for general fitness activities because it stretches and is very comfortable.

For active sports: Compression gear is a new type of clothing being marketed. Shirts or pants are made using seamless technology from polyolefin fabric, which draws moisture, humidity and perspiration away from the body. Garments are designed with high elasticity, fit very snugly (like a second skin) and help minimize muscle fatigue. These garments are popular for weight training, soccer and any other sport requiring a lot of running.

For outdoor winter activities: Everyone has different sensitivity to the cold. The key to comfort is dressing in multiple layers. No matter what the activity, the layers need to be versatile and efficient. Wear a number of lightweight items that you can add or remove in response to changing weather conditions or activity levels.

Layering for exercise involves wearing three different clothing types: a moisture-wicking base layer; an insulating midlayer; and a water-resistant, breathable outer layer.

- For the base layer, look for high-tech polyester, polyolefin and spandex.
- For the insulating layer, look for synthetic fleece or wool knit to help maintain your body temperature by trapping warm air against your skin.
- For the outer layer, look for polyester microfibers or rip-stop nylon with a durable water-repellent finish to provide wind and moisture protection while retaining body heat and allowing perspiration to evaporate.

Pay special attention to the head and extremities in cold-weather conditions. Wear a hat or head covering of some sort. Remember that 40 percent to 50 percent of body heat is lost through the head. Moisture-wicking and breathable gloves or mittens are also a must. Choose a pair that offers wind and water resistance if you're out in cold, wet weather. A good pair of thick socks made from lightweight wool, polyester or polypropylene will help keep feet warm. With thicker socks, you might need to adjust the size of your shoes.

Shopping with kids and teens

When selecting clothing for children and teens, remember they are sophisticated shoppers with great exposure to marketing information on the Internet. Peer influences usually are more important than preferences or opinions of parents. Shopping for teens is just as much a social and experiential event as it is an occasion to buy something. Consider these tips:

- Go shopping together and do some comparison shopping online.
- Spend time finding out about each other and what you both like.
- Use the opportunity to teach children about fabrics, finishes and how to be a wise consumer.
- Remember: A small investment in the right clothing for the sport or exercise might be the encouragement they need to stay active.

