

Information Leaflet
for Patients

Bra-related chafing in female athletes



The aim of this leaflet

This leaflet is designed to help female athletes know about bra-related chafing and how to prevent it.

Bra-related chafing in female athletes

Is bra-related chafing a common problem in female athletes?

Wearing sports bras is essential for women, providing comfort, supporting athletic performance, and minimizing breast movement-related pain. However, skin irritation caused by bras and bra straps is a common issue among female athletes. They can impact comfort, adherence to physical activity, and overall performance.

What are the usual symptoms?

Symptoms commonly include localized redness (Figure 1), burning sensations at points of contact, itch, and occasionally oozing from the eroded skin in areas where the bra contacts the skin—such as under the breasts, flanks, shoulders, and other areas in contact with seams or underwires.

Damaged skin followed by scabs may occur. Secondary bacterial or fungal infections may develop as well.

If such lesions become symptomatic during exercise, they may affect performance or even halt activity, especially in endurance sports.

In cases of repetitive trauma in the area, skin may become thickened and hyperpigmented.

What causes it?

Contributing factors include breast size, dry skin, long duration of exercise (marathons and ultra-trails, etc), poorly-fitted or unadapted to the athlete morphology bras, abrasive textiles, climatic conditions favoring sweating, and the use of heart rate monitor chest straps. Wounds on the nipple (jogger's nipple) can occur in women running without any bra.

When should I see a doctor?

The presence of red irritated inframammary lesions, should prompt consideration of alternative causes such as fungal infection, psoriasis, or contact dermatitis—potentially triggered by textiles, detergents, or anti-chafing creams.

If your skin does not improve or gets worse despite regular care, it's best to seek medical advice

How can I treat bra-related chafing?

Different situations may occur: mild irritations, erosions, oozing, infections, and eczema. The following treatments can be recommended depending on the situation: cleansing with soap and water, application of a healing cream, silicone dressing, use of antiseptics, topical antibiotic, antifungal cream, topical corticosteroid.

How do I prevent bra-related chafing?

Prevention is primarily based on choosing a bra that fits the runner's body morphology. Patients should be advised to test the bra during short sessions before wearing it during prolonged efforts or competitions. A barrier or anti-chafing cream is recommended to create an additional layer between the skin and the bra, thus limiting abrasion from textile friction.

While every effort has been made to ensure that the information given in this leaflet is accurate, not every treatment will be suitable or effective for every person. Your own clinician will be able to advise in greater details.