

How a well-fitting bra could spare legions of women needless surgery

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WOMEN should be offered free bra fittings on the Health Service to cut the number demanding unnecessary breast reductions, doctors said yesterday.

The British Medical Association believes many bigger-breasted women are consulting specialists about surgery when the pain and discomfort they experience could be alleviated simply by wearing a correctly-fitted bra.

It is to propose that bra fitting becomes the first step of the referral process for a breast reduction and says this could save the NHS tens of thousands of pounds that it currently spends on operations each year.

Studies have shown nine in ten women do not wear the correct bra size. Some 22 per cent have never been measured.

This is despite the problems an ill-fitting bra can cause such as wires digging in, chafing and pain in the neck and shoulders.

All of these could mistakenly be interpreted as evidence that a breast reduction operation is needed.

A motion to be put forward to the BMA annual conference later this month states: 'This meeting believes many women requesting breast reduction surgery are wearing bra sizes several sizes too small and that the services of bra fitters should be made available on the NHS as the first step in the referral for breast reduction surgery.'

'We therefore call on the BMA to lobby for these services to be provided.'

Breast reduction is one of the most common forms of cosmetic surgery.

A large NHS hospital carries out about 100 operations a year, costing about [pounds sterling]4,500 each. According to the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons, 3,219 women paid to have private breast reduction surgery last year, an increase of 19 per cent on the year before.

Professor Kefah Mokbel, a consultant breast surgeon at St George's and the Princess Grace hospitals in London, said: 'In one study we found 100 per cent of women were wearing the wrong bra.'

'They tend to underestimate the back size and overestimate the cup.'

'This leads to discomfort in the breast, neck and shoulders. These symptoms are interpreted as physical symptoms which indicate the need for breast reduction.'

'I strongly believe that setting up a proper bra-fitting service would reduce the symptoms these women suffer and reduce the number of women who are referred requesting breast reduction.'

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