

Ancient civilizations. Early Corsetry



Year: 1600 BC - 400 CE

Civilization: Egypt, Greece, Rome, Minoan (1600 BCE)

Name: Strophium, Mamillare

Description: The Egyptian, Greek and Roman early corsets were used to shape and bind the breast. It was a band on fabric wrapped around the chest (Image 1). Specific to the Egyptians they wore the fabric band in a figure 8 pattern to support the breast (Image 2). They did not bind the waist like how we imagine corsets to do in now. Older versions of corsets can be seen on Minoan Goddess figures, there seems to be a garment constricting the waist (image 3). However might not have been worn on normal civilians.

Material: Commonly linen or wool.

Middle ages



Year: 400 - 1000 CE

Civilization: Europe

Name: Cotehardie

Description: Corsets in the way we know it today still did not entirely exist, however we are getting closer. A Cotehardie is a long sleeved garment that is belted and fits closely to the body using buttons or lacing. It is a unisex garment, the only difference between male and female is the length. It is made of heavy fabric to help support the upper body. You can see that clothing has started to become more tight fitting. This is shown by the change from a cote, loose fitting outer jacket, to a cotehardie.

Material:

https://medieval-market.com/details.php?id_towar=1



Year: 1000 - 1200 CE

Civilization: Europe

Name: Bliaut

Description: The bliaut is a long dress with long wide square sleeves. In artwork, it is usually shown with knife pleats to show its materiality. This garment is also unisex. There are many

versions of the b্লাইট across European countries. The long dress stays the same (the dress has minor variation changes like the neckline and where the sleeves flair) while the waist belting changes. For example, Poland does not have a belt, France has a wide band of fabric wrapped around the waist, England tightened the dress at the waist with a thin belt or with no visible structure, and Italy uses a thin belt.

Material: Silk, linen, or wool.

https://www.eg.bucknell.edu/~lwittie/sca/garb/europe_class/europe_b্লাইট.html



Year: 400 CE (as early as 750 BC) - 1400 CE

Civilization: Europe

Name: Girdles

Description: An early girdle is a rope-like cord tied to the waist. For the Greeks, it was used to tie up flowy tunics to avoid getting tangled at the feet. The Japanese had a similar type of tie to hold back long kimono sleeves. There were also girdles made of iron worn in Britain during the druidical era that was used to cure sickness or even to help with giving birth. Girdles were also important to Christians, where it could be knotted in different ways to signify vows such as chastity or obedience. Perhaps because of this, girdles had a magical connotation in literature and were often used to show a woman's virginity.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

Girdle#:~:text=The%20girdle%2C%20in%20the%208th,deacons%20in%20the%20Eastern%20Church.

Renaissance

Year: 1500-1600 CE

Civilization: Europe

Name: Iron corsets

Description: Corsets have started to look like what we imagine in the current day. Researchers suspect that the wealthy used them for health reasons as support devices. However, because of the rarity of these garments, historians are still determining the specific purpose. The corset could be for either male or female.

Material: Iron or steel.

<https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/X8eq-xIAACUAjiaN>



Year: 16th Century

Name: Pair of bodies

Description: Sometimes also just called a body was used as an upper portion of a robe. At this time, the corset was still not meant to draw in the waist. Instead, it was used to shape the body into a conical and smooth shape. The chest was compressed, and the back had a high neckline to keep the back straight. In the late 16th century, the bones were extremely close together. Bones are close together, and it was more to make the body smoother.

Material: Commonly linen with reeds or whalebones. Bucks could be made of wood, horn, ivory, metal or whalebone.

17th Century



Year: 17th Century Corset said to originate from Italy and introduced into France and England.

Civilization: Europe, France, Germany, Britain

Name: Corset or Pair of stays

Description: The 17th century is the beginning of what we know as corsets today. A busk was added to the front to maintain a stiff structure. A busk is a rigid, thin plank carved and inserted into a front panel. The busk was removable and was looked at as an expression of love. The corset's neckline was now much rounder, and lower and more decorative items were added. Decoration included lace and ribbons. The shoulder straps, which used to be positioned vertically, now slid off the shoulders since they preferred wide and low necklines.

Material: Commonly linen with reeds or whalebones. Bucks could be made of wood, horn, ivory, metal or whalebone.

Special Note: From the end of the 17th century styles of corsets across European countries started to have less variation and became more cohesive.



18th Century

Civilization: Europe

During the 18th century, corsets have become much more popular. All women would wear corsets; however, the level of constriction, type of material, and ornamentation would change depending on status. Corsets were now an essential part of a woman's wardrobe. Corsets during this time slightly thinned the waist to make a v shape and were mainly used to flatten the stomach and create good posture. The neckline has returned to be higher and into a squarer shape. By the end of the 18th century, the necklines could also be rounder and more open. Different types of corsets were made to fit various settings.



Name: Long Stay

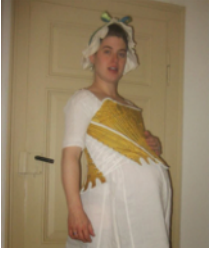
Description: The long stay was the most common type of corset, made of linen or cotton with whalebone or reed stiffener. It was usually worn over a chemise and was laced up from the back. They compressed the stomach and pushed up the chest, creating a smooth shape, and pinched in the waist to create a v shape. Bones were placed right next to each other for a solid finish. Like the name, the stays have a high neckline and rest low on the hip, creating a long waist.

Name: Jump

Description: This corset was much shorter than a long stay, it was more commonly worn by working class women or for informal events. Usually made of linen or wool and were lightly boned.

Name: Mantua Maker's Stay

Description: This corset was made to work with a Mantua, a type of formal gown. Again, it was heavily boned and often made of silk or satin. They were made to create a streamlined and smooth shape for the gown.



Name: Gestational stays

Description: Special stays were made for women who were pregnant. This included side lacing so that it could expand with the stomach. For breastfeeding women, corsets had flaps cut out for easy access to breastfeeding. These corsets were usually for the wealthy.

New additions:

Decorative stomachers: Decorate front pieces were added to the front of the corset. It was usually highly decorative with lace and patterned fabric.

Front lacing: Partial front lacing was created during this time. It provided minor adjustments to allow for a slightly more rounded bust shape.

Corsets are more exposed: For the first half of the 18th century, the French wore corsets with an open loose robe to show off the ornate stays. In England, heavily boned bodices were for special occasions and likely to be worn outside dresses.

Boning direction: Trailers realized that instead of the seams, the direction of the bones and the supportive inside bones were important in creating a smooth shape. Some tailors used steam to help shape the corset.

Nearing the end of the 18th century

Name: Half Boned stays

Description: These corsets become popular in the last quarter of the 18th century. It had less boning but vertical, angled, and even horizontal boning. Even with less boning, they still created a smooth square shape. It also uses spiral lacing in the back instead of the criss cross lacing method. This type of stay is the transition phase from the 18th century to the 19th century, where in the 19th century, stays become much less structured.



19th century

During the mid 19th century, sewing machines were introduced, which allowed for cheaper manufacturing and off-the-shelf corsets. Contrary to the tiny victorian waistline, the average woman of the time did not all sport this look. This look was more prevalent in high society, and people considered celebrities of their time. During this time, there were many types of corsets, and in the late 19th century, they had different corsets for different activities.

Year: 1810

Name: Corset

Description: This corset style is from the mid bust to almost the hip bone. It has a smooth shape with little boning. The main structure comes from the removable busk in the front, some boning in the back for lacing support, and the stitching. There are still no significant changes to the body. The primary purpose of this corset was to give you good posture and position the bust in the correct area. This was because the outer dress had a waist line just below the bust, so it was not relevant to cinch in the waist.

Material: Linen, cotton twill, wood busk



Year: 1830

Name: Corset

Description: During this period gussets at the chest and hip were added.



Clothing at this time featured lowered waistlines, nearer to the natural waist. Since you could see more of the body, corsets become slightly more structured. New features included a slightly curved busk that accommodated the stomach, and there was more boning to keep the corset from shifting up when you moved. However, a lot of the structure still came from stitching and cording. At this time, eyelets were still stitched and not metal, therefore not allowing for heavy pulling of the waist.

Material: Linen, cotton satin.

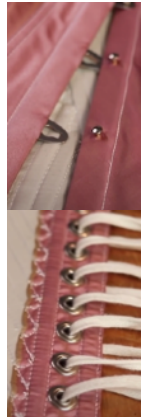


Year: 1860

Name: Corset

Description: There is a drastic change in corset styles, and it is starting to shape the waist. The hip height has risen. Gussets are still used for the bust and hip, but there is more boning around the torso. Most importantly, the metal busk was created to open in the front, allowing easy wearability. There are now metal grommets in the back, which will allow for a the was it thinning effect in the future. Dresses at this time still did not show off the hip, so the 1860's corset still focused on smoothing the torso. Furthermore, since the dresses had such a large circumference, anyone's waist would look small without much waist cinching. Bones are held into place using flossing and are sewn together in panels.

Material: Linen, cotton satin. Steel or whalebone bonding.



Year: 1880

Name: Corset

Description: This is when we see the hourglass shape corset we often think of today. Fashion of this era exposes more of the hip and is flat in the front. Boning channels were done externally and held in place using flossing. Curved vertical seams and some gussets create the corset curves. It is not heavily boned, but the spaces between can have cording to increase stiffness. The metal busk is still used but in a slightly different variation. Called a spoon busk, it is wider at the bottom of the corset, curves at the bottom, and slightly bow out around the belly. Therefore women will not have a completely flat stomach. Instead, the bust extends very quickly from the waist and has a low neckline creating extra space for the chest. There is also no compression on the chest, and the gentle support helps show off the long waisted look that was more popular.

Material: cotton, silk satin.



During the late 19th century, there were many styles of corsets. Due to the industrial revolution, corsets became easy to make. This created many design variations. Some corsets featured strap closures, hook closures, and split busk closures. The improvement of the medical field also influenced corsetry. They started making corsets that they labeled healthier, with even corsets for summer that had gaps. The pretty housemaid corset was marketed as the strongest and cheapest corset for women who work in more physical spaces. This also proves there was more to corsets than just the tightly laced Victorian corsets we think of in the modern era.



Year: 1900

Name: S Bent Corset

Description: The emphasis is placed on the slower half of the body. The bust and back are full, so from the side, it appears to be like an S. This look was achieved by adding padding to the corset. You can add hip pads underneath if you cannot get your waist that small. Complex seaming is also added during this time. The bones do not follow the seams and have their own boning channels. The metal busk is still a feature but has moved away from the spoon busk. Fashion at this time stay close to the body, and dresses would fall away from the body at the widest point. Therefore, the corsets were much longer so that the lines of the corset would not show through the clothes. The bust does not need to be held up, so the neckline is low.



Material: cotton, silk satin.

Year: 1910

Name: Corset

Description: Corsets are now moving towards being a girdle. That is reflected in the shape of this corset as it is a transitional point between the corset and girdle. It is now more focused on smoothing out the lower figure. It gives little support for the bust. The bust line has dropped below the bust, and we also see more separate bust support during this time. The bottom has fallen below the hip, but there is no structure below the hip for movement. The boning is separated and sparse. It is found in two parts of the side and the center back. The center front still includes the metal clasp busk, which helps keep the body flat, and the back also has metal grommets and is cross laced.

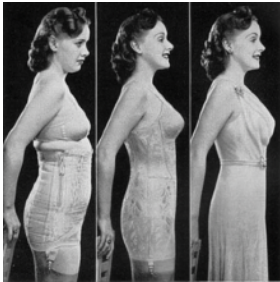
Material: Single layer of cotton.



Year: 1930

Name: Corset

Description: During this decade, the more boyish look was popular. There were more curves at this time than in the 1920s, but the most important thing was to have no bumps and a smooth body. So they focused on smoothing out the back side and making the Lordosis backline flatter. These garments covered the bum or thighs and flattened the bum and belly.



Year: 1960

Name: Spirella Corset

Description: Spirella was a corset company that sold made to measure corsets. Corsets no longer had a neckline and started low below the bust. The corsets were now much longer, covering the bum and upper thighs. New features included side lacing that could even be used as maternity support. Sometimes a top corset called a brassiere was worn with the corset. It looks like a combination of a bra and a corset. It had little molding and had an underwire.



PHILIPPO BORGHI SPINAL CORRECTION MATERNITY SUPPORT EXCESSIVE ABDOMINAL FLAT

Takeway: Now I see corsets more as support garments than drastic shapewear. I enjoyed that corsets were supposed to help with posture. That is something I would like now. I can also see how all this history has influenced our modern idea of a beautiful body. In the past, if you wanted a specific silhouette, you used corsets to achieve it. While in the modern era, corsets have a bad connotation, and we use dieting and plastic surgery to change into the “correct” shape. I find this very interesting, and if more people knew about the history of corsetry, perhaps it would change our views on doing more permanent body manipulation.

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