

## Finding the right support group

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*Bayview Village trip bodes well for the bod*

By [Kelly Gadzala](#)

I've gone where this shopping gal has yet to go before: I've bought my very first *real* bra at 38 years old.

Not that I've been wearing fake or imaginary bras all these years: I blush to say I rarely don one, and when I do I wiggle into one of those sports bra things — essentially wisps of stretchy fabric with straps.

Liliana Mann, bra-fitting doyenne, does her best to reserve judgement against the two mangey bras I bring to her when visiting her Bayview Village Shopping Centre store, **Linea Intima**, around the New Year.

But she can't help let slip a telling remark — they're mere nipple covers, she says — that makes me see what I've suspected for years: that I've been avoiding the task of getting fitted for a bra altogether.

We all know the stats: at least 80 percent of women wear the wrong bra size. Mann tells me that's because they don't understand what the bra sizes actually *mean*. For example, let's say you're a 34 B (like me, as I soon discover). The 34 refers to the band size, or measurement in inches around your bust and rib cage. The letter, meanwhile, refers to your cup size.

It's an important distinction to make, Mann says, because a common mistake women tend to make when a bra is too small is buy the larger back or band size and keep the cup size the same. What they should be doing is going up a cup size and keeping the back the same.

That is, when they actually admit they need to go bigger. More often than not, Mann tells me, women tend to stick with the same old bra size (sometimes the same old bra) over time. She recalls one customer, quite large, who came in looking for a bodysuit in a 36B. When Mann told the woman she needed something larger, the woman firmly replied that she'd always been a 36B.

After Mann asked the woman what size she was when she started wearing a 36B (a size 8) and what size was she now (a 22), she started making some headway getting the customer fitted in the correct size.

If her technique seems slightly brutal, remember Mann isn't out to make you feel crappy about yourself — quite the contrary. Sometimes her technique can be tricky — for instance she's been known to slip other sizes into the mix when women are trying on, just to see how they'll respond to a size she thinks is more appropriate.

But in the end, it's difficult to argue with the mirror when you're looking at a whole new you, one that looks perkier, slimmer and more confident than your pre-correctly-fitting-bra self.

Case in point: me in my nipple covers. In the glass wearing my old bra, I look flat and feel unsupported. I look far better in the 34B bras Mann brings me (she knows my size by eyeballing me but confirms with



THE PERFECT FIT: Linea Intima owner Liliana Mann says a good bra is the best investment you can make as it will last for up to two years.

the measuring tape).

A pink padded number with black lace overlay by Piege, \$76, isn't bad, while a padded underwire by the same make, \$85, is slightly better. Still, I feel like Betty Boop with the padding, and the underwire hurts my sternum.

Feeling good in a bra is vital, I discover during our two-hour try-on session. Slipping on as many brands as possible is best, I learn, as you develop a sense of what feels good and what doesn't.

Mann isn't too hung up on the mechanics of how to get a bra on, though she says you should always do up the bra on the last (ie: the loosest) hook. That way, when the bra stretches as it will over time, you'll have some leeway when it comes to tightening it.

To get yourself into the bra, simply lean forward, pull both sides of the bra back, and jiggle your girls into place.

I've seen other methods of getting your gals where they should be — namely the grab and shift approach — but that jiggle feels immensely satisfying.

A French bra by Simone Perele, \$145, feels and looks wonderful. Liliana — I feel I can call her by her first name now since we've bonded over bras — tells me the Europeans know their stuff. Their bras are more expensive, she says, but they'll last longer and feel better.

Many of the American ones, she tells me, will last 3-6 months depending on how often you wear them and how you care for them (handwashing or washing in the delicate cycle is best, she says). Meanwhile, a French or Belgium made bra can last two years and will end up costing less than the less expensive bras you have to replace every few months.

We hit a home run with the Belgium brand Marie Jo. At first the "Ines" style, a nude soft moulded cup microfibre bra, \$159, feels great. But the "L'Adventure" a cream number with black polka dots, \$122, feels even better. Another one with black bow detailing, \$132, is darling.

Remember: I'm out to purchase my first bra here. While bows and dots are sweet, I decide to play it safe and opt for something I feel I can wear every day. There will be time for lacy raciness later, I figure, once I've been fully indoctrinated into the bra mindset.

The "Audrey" fits the bill. Classic white with gauze-like side bands featuring delicate gathers, it has lace detailing on the pads and the straps. I try it on with my shirt and I look like a movie star. It's \$130.

After deciding this is the bra for me, I toss on one of the padded numbers from my earlier try on. I feel and look like Dolly Parton. In the land of bras, it definitely pays to buy up.

I can't resist the matching thongs to my new Belgium masterpiece, \$56.

I'm still getting used to my new bra. I don't wear it every day (though my nipple covers are now in the trash), and when I do I have little marks under my bust by day's end. That will go away, Liliana says, in a few weeks once the bra is broken in.

The strangest, yet most uplifting outcome of this whole experience? When I look in the mirror, I'm still surprised by my spanky new silhouette.

Who's the gal with the great gals, I ask?

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