



6 Things to Look for When Buying Exercise Apparel

How to Shop for Workout Clothes

-- By Leanne Beattie, Health & Fitness Writer – Spark People

A cool wind whipped around me as I crested the final hill along my running route. "Ah, relief!" I thought, pulling my dripping T-shirt away from my skin. This will cool me off. But instead of making me feel refreshed, the wind chilled me to the bone. "So much for a great workout," I mumbled as I shivered the rest of the way home. I thought I had dressed properly for my run, but apparently I had missed something before heading out the door that morning.

Wearing the right clothing can make the difference between an enjoyable workout and an hour of misery. And investing in some stylish yet comfortable workout clothing is [the perfect motivation to get you moving](#), whether you're hitting the gym, heading for the hills or exercising in the comfort of your own home. I already had enough [excuses not to exercise](#)—my workout clothing didn't need to be one more of them.

The big mistake I had made was wearing a cotton T-shirt for my workout. Instead, I should have worn a shirt designed to draw sweat away from the body and move it to the outer surface. These "wicking" clothes (also called technical or performance fabrics) are usually made of polyester and/or Lycra blends. They may cost more than your average cotton T-shirt, but they'll also last longer and keep you comfortable.

Cotton is comfortable, but the more you sweat during exercise, the more perspiration it traps, weighing down your garment and clinging to your skin. In summer, that can prevent your body from cooling properly. In winter, wearing those damp clothes for a workout keeps you cold. Add a cold wind to the equation, and you'll be chilled to the bone, just as I was.

Proper workout attire doesn't stop with your shirt. Cotton socks can also trap moisture and cause blisters, while a polyester-blend sock may help prevent them. Shorts, gloves, hats, running tights, [sports bras](#), workout pants—even underwear—are also available in performance fabrics.

I was ready to cross "discomfort due to clothing" off my exercise excuse list, so I went shopping. Here is what I looked for when purchasing my new exercise clothing.

Comfort

Avoid any rough fabrics that could chafe or irritate your skin during repetitive movement. Choose materials that let you move and don't constrict you. Pay closer attention to fit than size, as some workout clothes tend to be smaller and more form fitting than regular clothes. Look for items that have a small percentage of spandex listed on the label. This allows for a greater range of motion during exercise and can provide a very comfortable fit without being skin-tight.

Wicking ability

If you're going to be perspiring a lot, make sure your base layer will keep you dry and comfortable. Look for a polyester/ Lycra blend or another synthetic material. These materials keep you warm in the winter and cool in the summer—even when wet—and dry quickly. If you prefer natural materials, wool and bamboo exercise shirts naturally wick away moisture, too. *Try It!* SparkPeople's [bamboo tanks](#) and long sleeve [bamboo performance shirts](#) are soft like cotton and come in a variety of colors and sizes (up to 2XL).

Perfect fit

While you might be tempted to hide beneath baggy layers, you will feel more confident and sure of yourself if

you wear an outfit that looks good on you and plays up your assets. If you feel good about yourself, you'll be inclined to exercise more often. Clothing trends change for workout wear too, but the basics never go out of style. Add one or two more trendy pieces to your wardrobe (such as a performance T-shirt in this season's "hot" color) but keep your classic black yoga pants that are timeless. *Buy It! SparkPeople's [unisex performance T-shirts](#) are available in sizes up to 4XL, and our [women's performance T's](#) come in sizes small through 3XL!*

Layerable

Your workout wardrobe should be versatile, carrying you from the hottest months to the coldest months (if you'll be exercising outdoors). To avoid overspending during the changes of the seasons, keep this in mind when shopping, looking for items that can easily [layer during cold months](#). Start with a moisture-wicking dry layer, such as a wicking T-shirt or tank top, then add a warmer layer such as a fleece pullover. Finish with a protective outer layer (for waterproofing and wind proofing) such as a windbreaker or a nylon shell. Shop during the off-season for the best deals.

Technologically advanced

Many new workout pieces feature anti-microbial treatments to combat odor, while others have built-in ultra-violet protection to fight the sun's harmful rays. You can also buy glow-in-the-dark or luminescent jackets and running pants to help keep you visible if you exercise after dark. If you are a hiker concerned about Lyme disease, look for clothing that contains permethrin, a synthetic version of the natural insect repellent found in chrysanthemums.

Activity appropriate

Baggy pants aren't feasible for cycling or Spinning, and flowing tops won't keep you covered when you do downward dog in yoga class. Consider the activities you do most, and make sure the clothes you buy are comfortable and appropriate for that activity. Most people can't go wrong with fitted workout Capri pants and a fitted performance top, but always try on clothes before you buy—and try a few of your signature workout moves in the dressing room to be sure.

The more frequently you exercise, the more important it is to wear the right kind of clothes. Aside from keeping you comfortable, dry and cool, the right outfit also makes you feel like a million bucks, so [find pieces that flatter your figure](#) so you can hit the gym in style.