



DRESSING FOR YOUR BODY TYPE

There are four figure shapes for women. Knowing your figure type helps you select clothing that will accentuate your best features and minimize areas that you want to de-emphasize.

HOURGLASS

A woman with an hourglass shape is equally balanced on top and bottom; that is, her bust measurement and hip measurement are about the same. Another characteristic of this figure type is a defined waistline. When a woman has an hourglass figure, the difference between the bust and/or hip measurement and the waist measurement is usually ten inches or more.

Considered the ideal figure type, the hourglass shape is the figure type to keep in mind when considering clothing options. When you create the illusion of an hourglass shape if you have one of the other figure types, you'll also succeed in emphasizing the areas you want to emphasize and de-emphasizing the others.

When dressing to flatter your hourglass shaped figure, your main challenge will be to maintain the look of the ideal shape that you already have. Avoid styles, such as shifts or trapeze dresses that hide your shape.

Also avoid styles that tend to over-emphasize either bust or hips. For example, if you wear a gathered skirt, your hips will look bigger and make you look bottom-heavy. Paying attention to style and cut in the garments you buy pays off when your clothing flatters your ideal hourglass figure shape by following your natural curves. So even though a garment may be the latest trendy item, think twice before buying any clothing that hides your lovely shape.

Your other big challenge will be to find clothing that fits you well. Because most manufacturers cut their clothing for women who have triangle or sometimes rectangle shapes, you will often find that a dress that fits well in the bodice does not fit well in the hip area. Consider:

- wearing separates to attain a better fit.
- finding a dressmaker who can custom fit your clothes.
- becoming expert at fitting if you sew.
- finding a tailor who can alter ready-to-wear garments to your satisfaction.

Tops

The first thing to remember when selecting a top that will be flattering to your hourglass shaped figure is that the top shouldn't have elements that would over-emphasize bust or wide shoulders to the point that you would look top-heavy. So avoid features such as large ruffles, puffy sleeves, and thick shoulder pads, and look for flattering and elongating necklines, such as V-necklines, U-necklines, or sweetheart necklines. Avoid cowl and jewel necklines.

You want to follow your natural shape as much as possible because it's nice and curvy, so look for the more fitted styles and avoid straight, shapeless cuts in tops. The length of your top is another factor to consider. Avoid tops that are too long and end at the widest part of your hips.

Select sleeveless tops or tops with sleeves depending on your personal preferences, climate, and whether or not your arms are toned. If your top has straps, they shouldn't be too small in proportion



to your size. Spaghetti straps are usually not a good idea for women who have hourglass figures because they look too tiny contrasted to wide shoulders and an ample bust.

Best styles to wear are those with:

- surplice construction.
- V-necklines.
- wrap styling.
- princess seaming.
- close-fitted or semi-fitted styling.

Jackets

The key to a flattering jacket is great fit. For women who have hourglass shaped figures, close-fitted and semi-fitted styles work best because they follow the natural curves of the body. It's especially important that the jacket be fitted in the waistline, so avoid straight-cut styles because they hide your shape rather than showing it. Look for:

- single-breasted styles.
- princess seaming.
- reasonable, rather than exaggerated, shaping at the shoulders.
- styles that form a V-neckline rather than a rounded or high neckline.
- no pockets or hidden pockets.
- styles that don't hit at or below the hip.

Skirts

Try A-line styled skirts or straight skirts that are well fitted - neither too tight nor too loose. Skirts with princess seaming will enhance a vertical line.

Consider the length of the skirt because when the hem of a skirt falls across a thick part of the leg, either thigh or calf, it makes you look wider and shorter. So avoid mini-skirts unless you have slender legs, and keep the skirt length around the knee at the most flattering length. In most cases, the best skirt length for short women is just above the knee, at the knee, or just below the knee.

Most short women should avoid bias-cut skirts because they cling and show everything. If you are slender and want to really show off your figure, a bias-cut skirt or dress will certainly do it.

If you wear boots with a skirt, the boots should be high enough and your skirt hem low enough that there's no gap between them. This gives you an unbroken vertical line and helps you look taller.

Pants

Dark-colored pants with straight legs work best. Your best bet: try on lots of pants and jeans styles until you find the brands that fit you best. If you can't find a brand that fits in both the waist and hips, select pants that fit in the hips and have the waist altered. When you have alterations done, it's always easier to make something smaller than enlarge it in clothing because there usually isn't enough of a seam allowance to let out clothing.

When selecting pants or jeans, avoid:



- print designs.
- plaid
- low-rise waistlines.
- belting your pants or jeans at the hip.
- pleated styles
- cargo pants.

Dresses

It can be difficult to find dresses that fit your hourglass shaped figure properly because most clothing designers and manufacturers size for triangle shaped figures. If you are buying a dress that will need to be altered for a good fit, make sure that it's big enough in both the bust and hip areas. If not, alterations will probably not be successful. Usually the seam allowances in commercially produced clothing are scant at best.

The only exception is bridal wear, but even with wedding gowns, be sure there are ample seam allowances if you're going to need alterations.

Best styles for an hourglass shape? Try dresses that follow your curvy lines without too much emphasis either on top or bottom. Your defined waistline is a great asset, so make sure dresses you choose will show off your waistline. Wrap dresses or fitted sheaths usually work well as long as they fit well.

If you can find a good dressmaker or tailor, it would be worth the extra investment. When you have clothing custom made for you, expect to get a great fit, and use the best fashion fabric you can afford. If custom clothing is too pricey, and you're having difficulty finding dresses to fit your shapely figure, you may need to wear separates. That way, you can select different sizes for tops and bottoms.

If you're wearing a long dress, steer clear of peasant styles that fall at the ankle. Opt for a more elegant look in a monochromatic column dress of soft, drapey fabric that falls to the floor.



TRIANGLE

When dressing to flatter your triangle shaped figure, your main challenge will be to balance your figure so that you don't look bottom-heavy. Strive to achieve a look that mimics an hourglass shape.

Strategize your style so that you emphasize your upper body and minimize your hips and thighs. So avoid styles that tend to over-emphasize hips and thighs. For example, if you wear a gathered skirt, your hips will look even bigger and make you look more out of balance.

Play up your face, bust, neckline, and shoulders, and create some waist definition by calling attention to your slimmest areas from under the bust to your waistline. Wearing a sleeve that makes the shoulders appear broader also is a good technique and will make your figure look more like an hourglass shape.

Tops

Strategy Strive for balance so that your figure appears more like the ideal hourglass figure. Look for tops that will make you appear bigger on top while maintaining the look of a defined waistline. At the same time, look for style details that will help you look taller.

Necklines Many neckline styles will work well for petites who have triangle shaped figures. V-necklines and U-necklines are good because they add height. Also, try branching out with a scooped neckline or a sweetheart neckline, both of which will help made your shoulders appear broader.

Waistline Make sure that any top you select gives you the appearance of a defined waistline. This may either be at your natural waistline or under the bust with an empire style top.

Sleeves Short cap sleeves, flutter sleeves, or puff sleeves also widen your shoulder line to balance your hips.

Lines Surplice styles, princess seams, and vertical or chevron stripes all add to the illusion of height, so they are also desirable.

What to Avoid Avoid tops that are too long and end of the widest part of your hips. Also avoid shapeless styles with no waistline and tight sleeveless tops that emphasize a small bust. As a petite woman, be a bit careful with fussy details. Although one ruffle along a seamline will help balance your top with your hips, numerous ruffles or too dainty details may give you the appearance of a little girl. If you're a petite plus size, such frilly details will also seem out of proportion to your size.

Jackets

Wearing a jacket gives a woman who has a triangle shaped figure the opportunity to balance her figure by establishing a stronger shoulder line. Classicly styled single-breasted jackets, which are fitted or semi-fitted to give some waistline definition, are a good choice. Such jackets will have shoulder padding with a slightly extended shoulder. It's not necessary to go overboard with shoulder padding - nothing so extreme as the 1940s or 1980s styles when huge shoulders were in vogue.



Other jacket choices include bolero or cropped styles as long as you can still show a narrow waistline. Belted jackets or jackets with a band around the waist help define the waistline and can work for a triangle shaped figure.

Look for jackets that button to a V-opening, rather than jewel-neck or mandarin collar jackets. Short-sleeved jackets work best when they have at least a slight gathering at the sleeve head, which helps accentuate the shoulder line. Vertical lines, such as princess seams, help add the illusion of height.

Jackets should end at the high hip rather than across the hip or below the hip, so avoid long jackets. Also stay away from jackets that have patch pockets below the waistline because that adds bulkiness where you don't want it.

Skirts

If you have a triangle shaped figure, try A-line styled skirts or straight skirts that are well fitted - neither too tight nor too loose. Skirts with princess seaming will enhance a vertical line. Pencil skirts work best when worn as part of a suit with a flattering classicly styled jacket.

Consider the length of the skirt because when the hem of a skirt falls across a thick part of the leg, either thigh or calf, it makes you look wider and shorter. So avoid mini-skirts unless you have slender legs, and keep the skirt length around the knee at the most flattering length. In most cases, the best skirt length for short women is just above the knee, at the knee, or just below the knee.

Most short women should avoid bias-cut skirts because they cling and show everything, and so large hips will be over-emphasized, and if you have a tummy, it will show too. Also avoid full, pleated, or gathered skirts because they'll make your hips look bigger.

If you wear boots with a skirt, the boots should be high enough and your skirt hem low enough that there's no gap between them. This gives you an unbroken vertical line and helps you look taller.

Pants

Dark-colored pants with straight legs work best, but they may present a bit of a challenge for short women who have large hips and a small waist. Sometimes it's difficult to find pants that fit well at both the waist and hips, and it can be difficult to find pants with straight legs that are roomy enough in the hips. If you're 5'0" or under, you may also need to find pants with a shorter inseam than regular petite pants have.

Your best bet: try on lots of pants and jeans styles until you find the brands that fit you best. If you can't find a brand that fits in both the waist and hips, select pants that fit in the hips and have the waist altered. When you have alterations done, it's always easier to make something smaller than enlarge it in clothing because there usually isn't enough of a seam allowance to let out clothing.

When selecting pants or jeans, avoid:

- print designs.
- plaid
- low-rise waistlines.
- belting your pants or jeans at the hip.



- pleated styles
- cargo pants.

Dresses

Empire dresses, wrap dresses, and princess seamed dresses may all work for petite women who have triangle shaped figures as long as other style details of the dress add to an illusion of height, a defined waistline, and more width at the shoulder line to balance hips.

Solid color dresses in dark hues slenderize and help you look taller if you're short. Wearing your dress around knee length - just above or below the knee or at the knee - looks best. Wearing a mini-length dress can make you look wider because the hem of the dress falls across a thick part of the thigh. Wearing longer length dresses can not only look dowdy, but also does nothing to slenderize.

If you are looking for a print dress, select prints in colors that look good on you and look for design motifs that are proportionate to your size.

Avoid halter dresses unless you wear a jacket with the dress because the halter will tend to make narrow shoulders look even narrower. Also avoid shapeless dress styles, such as shift dresses, trapeze dresses, and tent dresses. None of those styles does anything to flatter your triangle shaped figure.



INVERTED TRIANGLE

When dressing to flatter your inverted triangle shaped figure, your main challenge will be to balance your figure so that you don't look top-heavy. Try to achieve a look that mimics an hourglass shape.

Strategize your style so that you emphasize your lower body and minimize your top half. So avoid styles that tend to over-emphasize the top. For example, if you wear puffed sleeves, your top will look even bigger and make you look more out of balance.

Strive to achieve a more balanced look, and create some waist definition by calling attention to your slimmest areas from under the bust to your waistline.

Strategy: Strive for balance so that your figure appears more like the ideal hourglass figure. Look for tops that won't make you appear bigger on top while maintaining the look of a defined waistline. At the same time, look for style details that will help you look taller.

Color: Wearing a dark color on top will help make the top appear a bit smaller.

Shaping: If a very large bust looks quite disproportionate, wearing a minimizer bra will make for a less top heavy look.

Necklines: V-necklines and U-necklines are good because they add height. If you have an inverted triangle shaped figure, avoid boatneck styles because they visually widen your top.

Waistline: Make sure that any top you select gives you the appearance of a defined waistline. This may either be at your natural waistline or under the bust with an empire style top. If the top has an under-bust seam or band, it should fall under and not across the bust. You may need to go up a size so that tops will fit properly in the bust.

Sleeves: Select narrow sleeves that extend at least to the elbow, and avoid short cap sleeves, flutter sleeves, or puff sleeves because they widen your shoulder line. Sleeveless styles usually look best on women who have slender, toned arms.

Lines: Surplice styles, princess seams, and vertical or chevron stripes all add to the illusion of height, so they are also desirable.

What to Avoid: Stay away from off-the-shoulder styles, details at the shoulders, and big shoulder pads. Also avoid shapeless styles with no waistline, chunky knit fabric, and high necklines.

Jacket

Finding a jacket to fit an inverted triangle shaped figure can sometimes be challenging because many jackets feature thick shoulder padding and extended shoulder lines, neither of which works very well for a short woman who has an inverted triangle shaped figure. Classicly styled single-breasted jackets, which are fitted or semi-fitted to give some waistline definition, can be a good choice as long as the jacket's style doesn't emphasize the shoulder line. Look for jackets that button to form a flattering V-neckline, rather than jewel-neck or mandarin collar jackets.

Jackets with princess seams give a nice vertical line that flatters short women, and peplum jackets work well because they balance the figure by enhancing the hip. Avoid bolero or cropped styles.

Women who have inverted triangle shaped figures have the only figure type that actually benefits from more hip emphasis, so jacket details that fall below the natural waistline, such as patch pockets, will help balance the figure.



Skirts

If you have an inverted triangle shaped figure, you're able to wear skirts that have more fullness. In fact, yours is the only petite figure type that really can wear fuller skirts well. Fullness in a skirt enhances the hips, which you can afford to do in order to balance a larger top. Other skirt styles that will work for short women who have inverted triangle shaped figures are A-line styles and pegged skirts. A pegged skirt is narrower at the hem than at the hip, and this type of styling makes the hips look larger.

Consider the length of the skirt because when the hem of a skirt falls across a thick part of the leg, either thigh or calf, it makes you look wider and shorter. However, many short women who have inverted triangle shaped figures also have slender legs. In that case, you may be able to wear a mini-skirt, but avoid mini-skirts unless you do have slender legs. Otherwise, keep the skirt length around the knee at the most flattering length. In most cases, the best skirt length for short women is just above the knee, at the knee, or just below the knee. If you're wearing a pegged skirt, it's essential that the hem be above the knee so that you're able to walk in it.

If you wear boots with a skirt, the boots should be high enough and your skirt hem low enough that there's no gap between them. This gives you an unbroken vertical line and helps you look taller.

Pants

Dark-coloured pants with straight legs work best for most petites because they give short women a more slender and taller appearance. If you're 5'0" or under, you may also need to find pants with a shorter inseam than regular petite pants have.

If you have an inverted triangle shaped figure, you can wear pants or jeans with pocket details to enhance your hips. You're also able to wear tapered pants or jeans, which will make hips appear larger to balance out your top. If you're also a tiny petite with very slender legs, you may be able to wear skinny jeans. Because of your small hips, you're able to find jeans that fit more easily than women who have other figure types.

Dresses

If you have an inverted triangle shaped figure, your first consideration in selecting a dress is to make sure that it fits well in the bust. Avoid dresses that pull across the bust because that makes for an unflattering appearance. Even if a dress that fits well in the bust is too big in the hips, it can be taken in if necessary. There are three types of styles that work especially well for short women who have inverted triangle shaped figures:

- **Wrap Dresses:** Wrap dresses, which form V-necklines, work well for the inverted triangle figure type. Avoid puffed sleeves and ruffles on a wrap dress so that the top won't look larger.
- **Sheath Dresses with Pegged Skirts:** A well-fitting sheath dress with a pegged skirt to make hips appear a bit more in balance with broad shoulders is another workable style for the petite woman who has an inverted triangle shaped figure.
- **Dresses with Hip Detail:** Dresses with hip detail, such as a ruffle or pockets, also put more emphasis on hips and help balance the shape of an inverted triangle figure so that it looks more like an hourglass.



RECTANGLE

If you have a rectangle shaped figure, you have a balanced figure type, just as women who have an hourglass figure do. If you're both a tiny size and have a rectangle shaped figure, other women would have wanted to have your figure type had you lived in the 1920s or 1960s when boyish figures and straight dresses were all the rage. Although your shape was considered ideal in other eras, fashion's darling right at the moment is the hourglass shaped figure.

Rectangle figures can be any size; it's the shape that determines the rectangle figure type. Women who have rectangle shaped figures don't have a defined waistline, but they do have an equally balanced top and bottom.

Petite women who have rectangle figure types have more of a challenge in dressing because they are short. So if you're a petite women who has an rectangle figure, you'll want to combine flattering styles for your figure types and also dress to longer and leaner.

Celebrities with rectangle shaped figures include:

- Kristi Yamaguchi
- Reese Witherspoon
- Marissa Jaret Winokur

When dressing to flatter your rectangle shaped figure, your main challenges will be to maintain the figure balance that you already have and create the illusion of a defined waistline so that you look more like the hourglass ideal. Avoid styles, such as shifts or trapeze dresses, that hide your shape.

The exception would be for women who wear extra-small sizes, such as 00P or 0P, and who want to wear trendy trapeze or straight shift dresses or tops. You can get away with these styles because of your tiny size. If you wear such styles, you're imitating the 1920s flapper style or the 1960s Twiggy look, rather than trying to create a shapely look. However, if you're size 6 or above, you're better off sticking with the strategy of creating an illusion of an hourglass figure.

Also avoid styles that tend to over-emphasize either bust or hips. For example, if you wear a gathered skirt, your hips will look bigger and make you look bottom-heavy. Likewise, if you wear a style such as an off-the-shoulder top, you may find that you appear top-heavy.

Your other big challenge will be to create the illusion of a defined waistline. Placing emphasis on the waist or midriff area in such a way that you appear to have a defined waistline will make your figure look more shapely.

Tops

Look for tops that create the illusion of a defined waistline. That may mean either an empire waistline that has a band under the bust or a top that has a band at the natural waistline.

Tops with self-belts or other belted tops can work well too as long as the belt does not fall below the natural waistline.

Although styling of the top is key, you can also use color contrast to bring out the waistline definition. When the waistline band is a darker color, the definition created is more pronounced and desirable. Dark colors recede, which makes the area covered by the dark color look smaller. Tops with curved-seam line, side panels in dark colors that contrast against the color of the front can also create the illusion of a waistline. These types of tops can be difficult to find, but if you sew, you should be able to find or design a workable pattern for such a top.



Avoid tops that have too much sleeve or detail unless you balance your look with details that add hip interest too. Otherwise, your naturally balanced figure can appear unbalanced.

For an evening look, try a corset-type top that cinches your midriff.

Jackets

If you have a rectangle shaped figure, pick jackets that define the waistline and don't upset your already balanced shape with too much detail. Belted jackets, which can be cinched at the waist, work well whether they're self-belts or separate belts.

Another feature to look for in a jacket is a focal point at the waistline, such as a noticeable belt buckle. This draws the eye inward toward the focal point, making your waistline seem smaller.

Contoured seam lines that curve inward at the waistline can also help make a waistline that really isn't there. Like-wise, a chevron pattern draws the eye inward and helps give shape to the figure.

Avoid jackets that are longer than top-of-the-hip length. Also stay away from boxy shapes, such as Chanel-type cardigan styles, because they simply repeat the rectangle shape that you want to look curvier.

Skirts

Try A-line styled skirts, especially those with self-belts that you can cinch to create waistline definition or skirts constructed in panels with princess seaming that curves outward from the waistband and inward at the hem to mimic a shapely hip.

Another way to create the illusion of a curvier figure is to peg your pencil skirts. If you don't sew, a tailor can make this easy adjustment, which will narrow the skirt at the hem. Before you run out and have all of your straight, pencil skirts tailored, make sure this look is right for you because you'll need to have exactly the correct hem length to pull it off. Otherwise, you may not be able to walk in your skirt because it will be too tight at the hem. Pegged skirt work best for slender women, so if you're a full-figured short woman, you may want to pass on this skirt style because it will emphasize hips.

Consider the length of the skirt because when the hem of a skirt falls across a thick part of the leg, either thigh or calf, it makes you look wider and shorter. So avoid mini-skirts unless you have slender legs, and keep the skirt length around the knee at the most flattering length. In most cases, the best skirt length for short women is just above the knee, at the knee, or just below the knee.

Most short women should avoid bias-cut skirts because they cling and show everything. Even if you have a tiny bit of tummy bulge, it will show in a bias-cut skirt.

If you wear boots with a skirt, the boots should be high enough and your skirt hem low enough that there's no gap between them. This gives you an unbroken vertical line and helps you look taller.

Dark-coloured pants with straight legs work best for most petites because they will enhance the illusion of a leaner, longer body. If you're 5'0" or under, you may also need to find pants with a shorter inseam than regular petite pants have.

Pants

Keep in mind that your main strategy to create the illusion of a curvy figure will be to find a way to define your waistline, and this definition should not be at the hipline, so look for pants or jeans with at least a mid-rise or even high-waisted pants that can be cinched with a belt to create the look of a narrower waistline. Alternatively, you can create the appearance of a waistline with the type of top you wear. When you use this strategy, make sure that your pants are not bulky at the top.



When selecting pants or jeans, avoid:

- print designs.
- plaid
- low-rise waistlines.
- belting your pants or jeans at the hip.
- pleated styles
- cargo pants.

Dresses

Several dress styles will work well for the rectangle shaped figure.

Empire dresses are an option because they create a waistline under the bust, and the skirt flows from the waistline. This style is also good because it doesn't distort the natural balance of your shape.

Wrap dresses with A-line skirts are a good choice too. You can use the wrap tie to cinch your waistline.

Color block dresses with a waistband that's a darker color than adjacent colors define your waistline by making it appear to recede. Although it's often more difficult to find this style of dress, you can usually locate a color block dress that's right for you. If you sew, consider a color block style the next time you make a dress for yourself.

Finally, for special occasion dressing, flatter your figure with a corset-style dress, which has a vertically paneled and boned midriff. This style is especially nice for the bride who has a rectangle shaped figure. Bridal wear is frequently custom made, so if you're working with a dressmaker, offer a sketch or picture of a similar gown from a bridal magazine to show her the style you want.

Source: <http://petite.about.com/od/whatpetitemeans/tp/4figureshapes.htm>