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Curve appeal; Show off your voluptuous figure

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Illustrations: Colour Photo: The gap / Show off your voluptuous figure

Colour Photo: Aldo shoes / Shoes should be high heels that will match your body's proportions

Colour Photo: John Li, Getty / Nigella Lawson.

Colour Photo: Aldo Shoes / Curvy girls should wear thick belts, thin ones will make you look big-boned at best

Colour Photo: Mario Anzuoni, Reuters / America Ferreras and Salma Hayek.

Couture and curves are not always fast friends.

It wasn't always so. Think Sophia Loren, Jayne Mansfield and, of course, Marilyn Monroe, who was so proud of her curves that she'd add extra padding to her bra and wear her skirts and pants too small. Even some of the 1980s bodies were positively pudgy by today's standards: Molly Ringwald, Melanie Griffith and Elisabeth Shue. It wasn't until the '90s that curves became passé, when the "heroin chic" look swept curves away. Girls suddenly looked like lanky boys in skirts and curvy ladies everywhere wished a death upon their braless, tank-topped forms.

But it's not all doom and gloom for the curvaceous figure. There are clothes out there that will look smashing on you, voluptuous woman, if you follow a few simple rules.

The worst thing that can happen to a curved girl is that she falls in love with a skinny wardrobe. It means multiple ego-draining shopping expeditions trying on clothes that are designed for straight-figured girls. To get in the right mindset for curvy shopping, think Nigella Lawson instead of Kate Moss. With that mental image, you'll breeze past those spaghetti-strap camisoles (too flimsy for your ample assets) and instead opt for oh-so-hot jersey alternatives.

Rule 1: Less is more

Show off your curves in well-fitting clothes. If you try to cover up in baggy cuts you'll look fat. Instead, emphasize your thinnest part (just underneath your bust) and cinch in your waist with belts and wrap dresses. That way, people will see your figure, not just a tent of unshapely material. So go for fitted tops, preferably with scooped or V-shaped necklines, rather than baggy turtlenecks. But do stay away from flimsy tops that will make you look more slutty than sultry.

Rule 2: Skirting the issue

On you -- and many women -- skirts are way more flattering than trousers. A-line skirts, especially, look good on most figures. However, the one style to avoid if you're curvy is the bias-cut, which will make you look extra wide.

If you can't give up pants, look for impeccable tailoring at the waist and behind. Consider getting pants altered to fit perfectly. (Clothes by Muriel Dombret on Wellington Street will make any of its styles to fit your shape perfectly for a slight fee. So if your waist is size 8, but your hips are a voluptuous 10, no problem.)

Rule 3: The jacket

A curvy woman should invest in jackets that are perfectly tailored to her form with a nicely fitted waist that emphasizes her hourglass silhouette. Watch how celebrities like Salma Hayek and Queen Latifah use fitted jackets to create formidable form. If you're very full on top, leave the buttons undone.

Rule 4: More is less

If you're curvy, save up and splurge on fewer items of clothing. Your figure deserves the crème de la crème of tailoring and fabric, not two-for-the-price-of-one bargain-basement finds. Try on everything, be painstakingly selective, and, if you start to feel disheartened, buy shoes to pep you up.

Rule 5: Mood indigo

Jeans are an exception to the pants rule, but fit is still imperative. If you're curvy, it's best to wear them long in dark colours -- boot-cut, not too high or too low a rise on the waist. Obviously, the muffin look is a no-no. Try labels such as Citizens of Humanity, Levi's and Gap. (You may even want to think about less "cool" places like Talbots for jeans that fit a fuller figure.) Don't forget a thick belt and add a heel as high as you can manage to look ravishing. If you find a perfect pair of jeans, buy two -- one long enough for heels and one for flats.

Rule 6: Size doesn't matter

Do your utmost to ignore the size on the label and instead concentrate on the fit. A medium-sized curvy girl will often have to wear an XL in some "skinny-cut" labels. Don't lose heart when this happens. The best way to deal with being forced into sizes you don't like is to cut off the label when you get home.

Rule 7: Support structures

Curvy girls need to spend more time finding the right lingerie. Get fitted for a new bra regularly. Your size will fluctuate with weight gain or loss, aging and even changes in your hormones. Don't think that just because you were a 34D three years ago you still are today. And expect to pay anywhere from \$80, well into the double digits. For a wide selection and great service, try BraChic on Richmond Road and Marianne's on Carling Avenue in the Westgate Mall.

Rule 8: Jersey

It's everywhere right now, from Aritzia to Diane von Furstenberg. Jersey falls lightly and drapes beautifully across your form. It conceals bulges and caresses curves. It has enough stretch to mould you without making you feel restricted. Jersey is your new best friend. Stockpile it now for seasons to come.

Rule 9: Accessorize

Curvy girls should wear thick belts; thin ones will make you look big-boned at best. Shoes should be high heels that will match your body's proportions. Kitten heels, while incredibly cute, are better suited to straight, skinny figures. If your curves extend to your calves, British retailer Duo Boots (duoboots.com) makes knee-high boots tailor-made to your calf size. For a large selection of shoes in wide widths, check out canada.zappos.com.

Rule 10: Attitude

A spoonful of confidence is a key ingredient for every girl, but perhaps more so for curvaceous ones. Beyoncé wouldn't be quite so voluptuously imposing if she played the wallflower. Stand up straight, smile and sashay into that room. You'll have men quivering with lust, and women of all shapes eyeing your assets enviously.