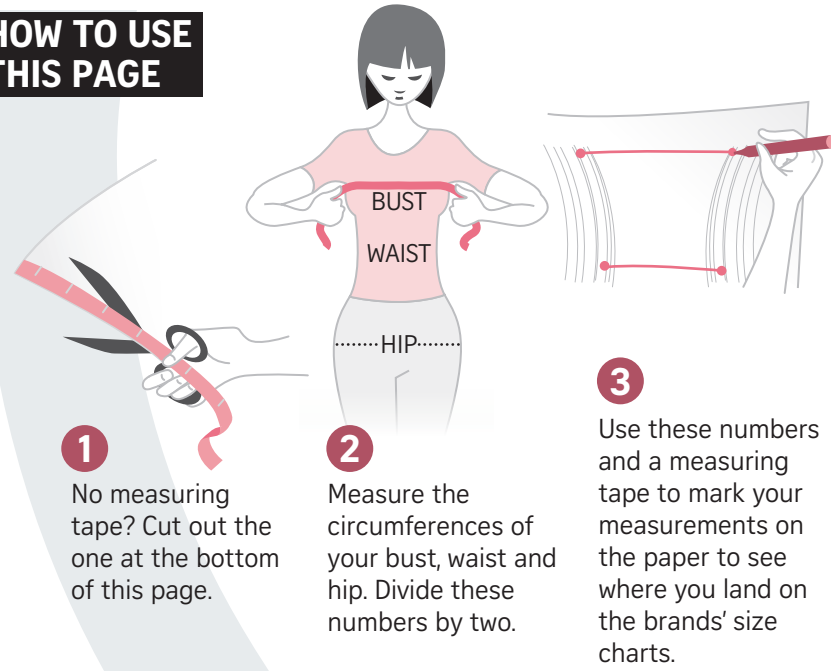


Decoding women's clothing sizes

How sizes differ across brands

ST compared women's sizing charts available on the websites of eight popular brands in Singapore to see how much the sizing varies. Sizes are based on half-circumference body measurements, and those that exceeded the paper size were excluded. For brands with a range of measurements, the visualisation shows the average.

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

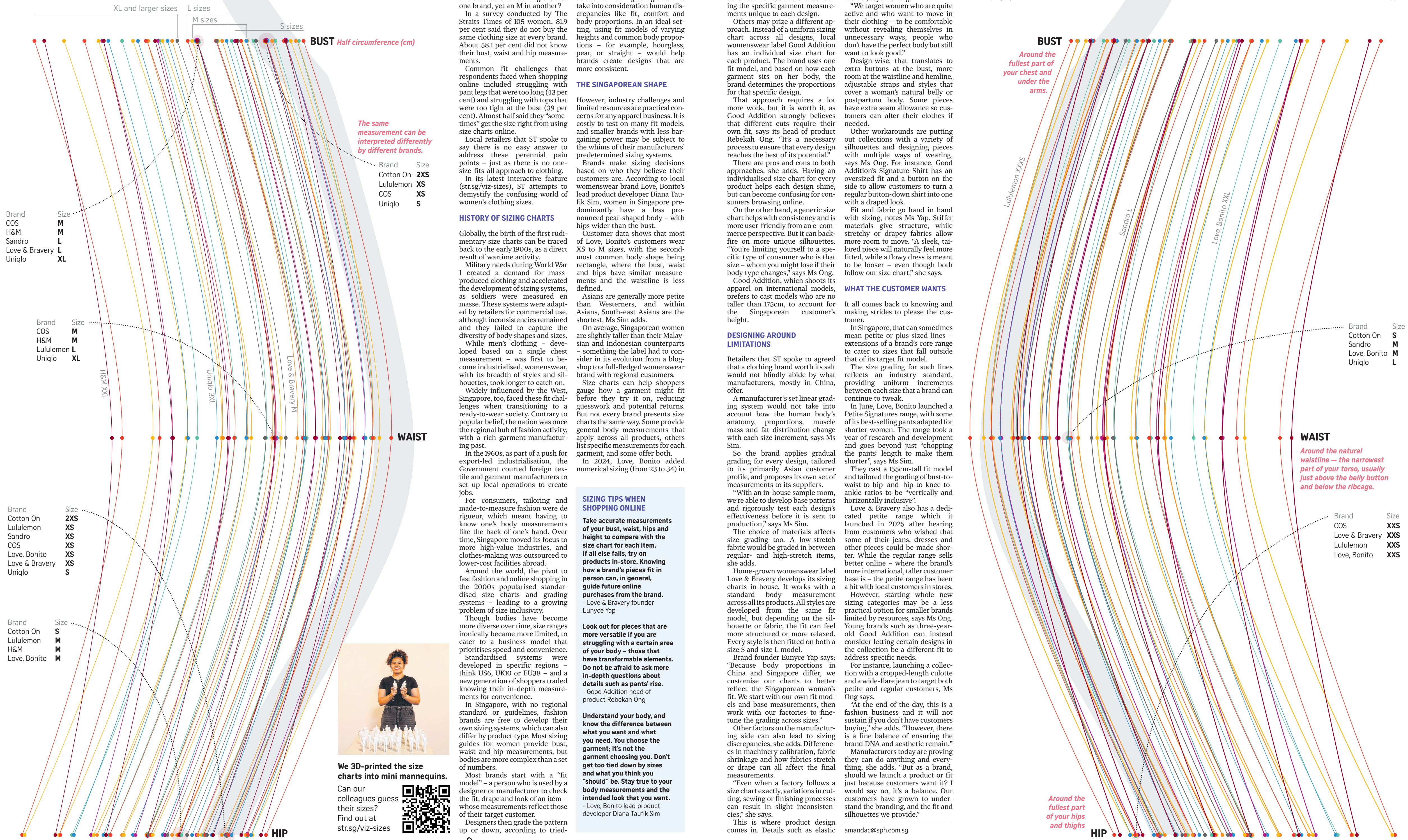


1 No measuring tape? Cut out the one at the bottom of this page.

2 Measure the circumferences of your bust, waist and hip. Divide these numbers by two.

3 Use these numbers and a measuring tape to mark your measurements on the paper to see where you land on the brands' size charts.

- BRAND KEY
- COS
 - Cotton On
 - H&M
 - Love, Bonito
 - Love & Bravery
 - Lululemon
 - Sandro
 - Uniqlo



We 3D-printed the size charts into mini mannequins. Can our colleagues guess their sizes? Find out at str.sg/viz-sizes



Shopping for clothes is often confusing because sizing charts are not consistent across brands

Amanda Chai
Style Correspondent

When it comes to buying clothes online, do you really know your size? Why is it that you could be a size S based on the sizing chart of one brand, yet an M in another?

In a survey conducted by The Straits Times of 105 women, 81.9 per cent said they do not buy the same clothing size at every brand. About 58.1 per cent did not know their bust, waist and hip measurements.

Common fit challenges that respondents faced when shopping online included struggling with pant legs that were too long (43 per cent) and struggling with tops that were too tight at the bust (39 per cent). Almost half said they "sometimes" get the size right from using size charts online.

Local retailers that ST spoke to say there is no easy answer to address these perennial pain points – just as there is no one-size-fits-all approach to clothing.

In its latest interactive feature (str.sg/viz-sizes), ST attempts to demystify the confusing world of women's clothing sizes.

HISTORY OF SIZING CHARTS

Globally, the birth of the first rudimentary size charts can be traced back to the early 1900s, as a direct result of wartime activity.

Military needs during World War I created a demand for mass-produced clothing and accelerated the development of sizing systems, as soldiers were measured en masse. These systems were adapted by retailers for commercial use, although inconsistencies remained and they failed to capture the diversity of body shapes and sizes.

While men's clothing – developed based on a single chest measurement – was first to become industrialised, womenswear, with its breadth of styles and silhouettes, took longer to catch on.

Asians are generally more petite than Westerners, and within Asians, South-east Asians are the shortest, Ms Sim adds.

On average, Singaporean women are slightly taller than their Malaysian and Indonesian counterparts – something the labels had to consider in its evolution from a blogshop to a full-fledged womenswear brand with regional customers.

Size charts can help shoppers gauge how a garment might fit before they try it on, reducing guesswork and potential returns. But not every brand presents size charts the same way. Some provide general body measurements that apply across all products, others list specific measurements for each garment, and some offer both.

In 2024, Love, Bonito added numerical sizing (from 23 to 34) in

addition to alpha sizing (XXS to XXL) for its tailored pants and jeans. This was to address "in-between" customers who could not find their perfect size, says Ms Sim.

The label now provides a body measurement chart displaying its standard body measurement ranges for each size, and a chart showing the specific garment measurements unique to each design.

Others may prize a different approach. Instead of a uniform sizing chart across all designs, local womenswear label Good Addition has an individual size chart for each product. The brand uses one fit model, and based on how each garment sits on her body, the brand determines the proportions for that specific design.

That approach requires a lot more work, but it is worth it, as Good Addition strongly believes that different cuts require their own fit, says its head of product Rebekah Ong. "It's a necessary process to ensure that every design reaches the best of its potential."

There are pros and cons to both approaches, she adds. Having an individualised size chart for every product helps each design shine, but can become confusing for consumers browsing online.

On the other hand, a generic size chart helps with consistency and is more user-friendly from an e-commerce perspective. But it can backfire on more unique silhouettes.

"You're limiting yourself to a specific type of consumer who is that size – whom you might lose if their body type changes," says Ms Ong.

Good Addition, which shoores its apparel on international models, prefers to cast models who are no taller than 175cm, to account for the Singaporean customer's height.

THE SINGAPOREAN SHAPE

However, industry challenges and limited resources are practical concerns for any apparel business. It is costly to test on many fit models, and smaller brands with less bargaining power may be subject to the whims of their manufacturers' predetermined sizing systems.

Brands make sizing decisions based on who they believe their customers are. According to local womenswear brand Love, Bonito's lead product developer Diana Taufik Sim, women in Singapore predominantly have a less pronounced pear-shaped body – with hips wider than the bust.

Customer data shows that most of Love, Bonito's customers wear XS to M sizes, with the second-most common body shape being rectangle, where the bust, waist and hips have similar measurements and the waistline is less defined.

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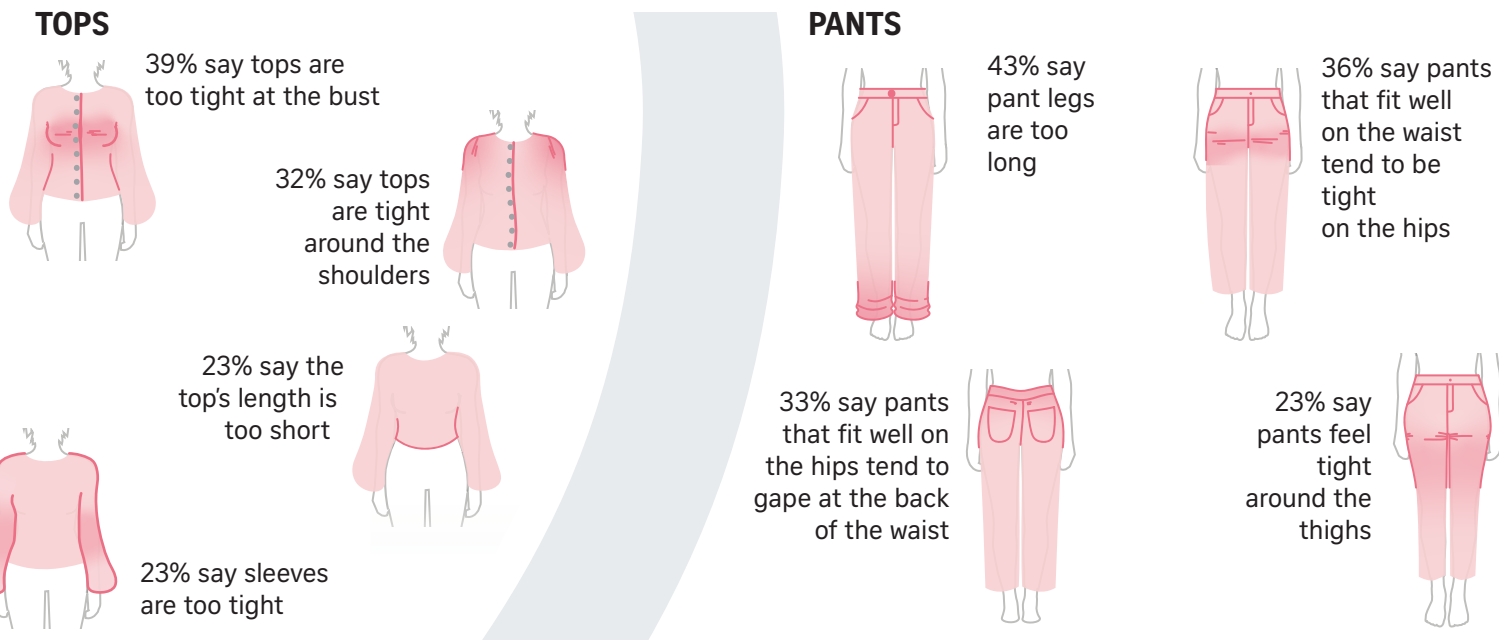
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SIZING TIPS WHEN SHOPPING ONLINE

- Take accurate measurements of your bust, waist, hips and height to compare with the size chart for each item.
- If all else fails, try on products in-store. Knowing how a brand's pieces fit in person can, in general, guide future online purchases from the brand.
- Love & Bravery founder Eunyce Yap
- Look out for pieces that are more versatile if you are struggling with a certain area of your body – those that have transformable elements. Do not be afraid to ask more in-depth questions about details such as pants' rise.
- Good Addition head of product Rebekah Ong
- Understand your body, and know the difference between what you want and what you need. You choose the garment; it's not the garment choosing you. Don't get too tied down by sizes and what you think you "should" be. Stay true to your body measurements and the intended look that you want.
- Love, Bonito lead product developer Diana Taufik Sim

Common struggles when shopping for tops and pants, according to our survey of 105 women.



BUST

Design-wise, that translates to extra buttons at the bust, more room at the waistline and hemline, adjustable straps and styles that cover a woman's natural belly or postpartum body. Some pieces have extra seam allowance so customers can alter their clothes if needed.

Other workarounds are putting out collections with a variety of silhouettes and designing pieces with multiple ways of wearing, says Ms Ong. For instance, Good Addition's Signature Shirt has an oversized fit and a button on the side to allow customers to turn a regular button-down shirt into one with a draped look.

Fit and fabric go hand in hand with sizing, notes Ms Yap. Stiffer materials give structure, while stretchy or drapey fabrics allow more room to move. "A sleek, tailored piece will naturally feel more fitted, while a flowy dress is meant to be looser – even though both follow our size chart," she says.

WHAT THE CUSTOMER WANTS

It all comes back to knowing and making strides to please the customer.

In Singapore, that can sometimes mean petite or plus-sized lines – extensions of a brand's core range to cater to sizes that fall outside that of its target fit model.

The size grading for such lines reflects an industry standard, providing uniform increments between each size that a brand can continue to tweak.

In June, Love, Bonito launched a Petite Signatures range, with some of its best-selling pants adapted for shorter women. The range took a year of research and development and goes beyond just "chopping the pants' length to make them shorter", says Ms Sim.

They cast a 155cm-tall fit model and tailored the grading of bust-to-waist-to-hip and hip-to-knee-to-ankle ratios to be "vertically and horizontally inclusive".

Love & Bravery also has a dedicated petite range which it launched in 2025 after hearing from customers who wished that some of their jeans, dresses and other pieces could be made shorter. While the regular range sells better online – where the brand's more international, taller customer base is – the petite range has been a hit with local customers in stores.

However, starting whole new sizing categories may be a less practical option for smaller brands limited by resources, says Ms Ong. "Young brands such as three-year-old Good Addition can instead consider letting certain designs in the collection be a different fit to address specific needs."

For instance, launching a collection with a cropped-length culotte and a wide-flare jean to target both petite and regular customers, Ms Ong says.

"At the end of the day, this is a fashion business and it will not sustain if you don't have customers buying," she adds. "However, there is a fine balance of ensuring the brand DNA and aesthetic remain."

Manufacturers today are proving they can do anything and everything, she adds. "But as a brand, should we launch a product or fit just because customers want it? I would say no, it's a balance. Our customers have grown to understand the branding, and the fit and silhouettes we provide."

WAIST

Around the natural waistline – the narrowest part of your torso, usually just above the belly button and below the ribcage.

HIP

Around the fullest part of your hips and thighs.

