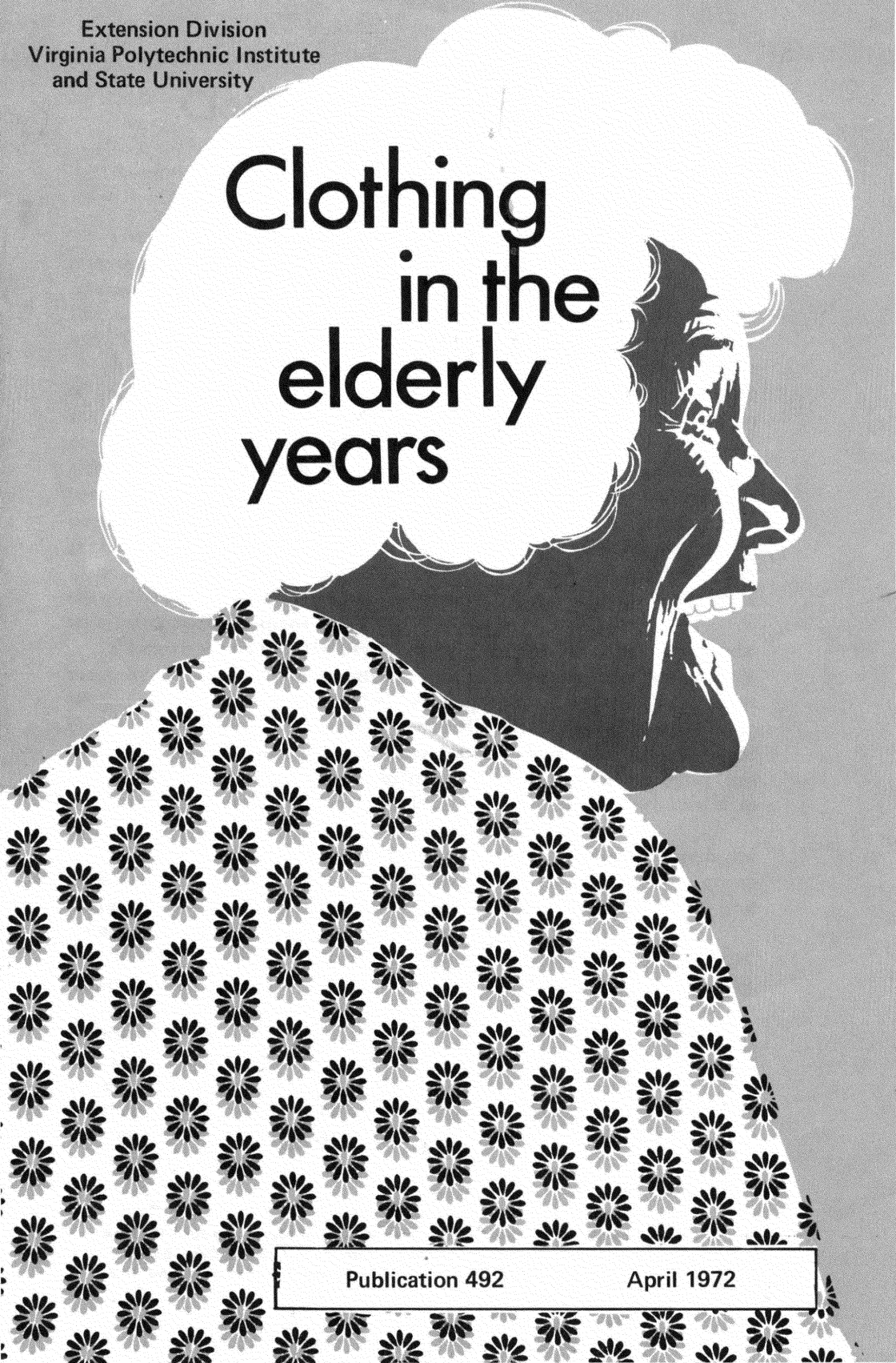


Extension Division
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Clothing in the elderly years



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Clothing For The Elderly

Recommended by Mary Helen Marshall, Extension Specialist, Clothing

Clothing for the middle aged and elderly has been given very little attention, in spite of the fact that people after forty often have renewed interests in clothing. Their children are gone from the home and money that once was needed for the children can now be spent on mom and dad. They find more free time for relaxing, even a chance for travel.

A recent fashion article pointed out that industry, through oversight or failure to look at statistics, is missing a good bet by not appealing to the "medicare set." The author says the oldsters 65 and over are not out of the clothing market; many of them are very clothes conscious, alert and go-go. He feels that while the medicare set is smaller than younger age groups and their income is lower, their dollar power is still potent in the clothing field. Prolonged life expectancy, retirement plans, profit sharing, mutual funds offer purchasing power — power enough to be considered as an important segment of the apparel market. They should be rated as a growing and significant factor in the clothing industry's merchandising plans.

Research shows that the psychological needs of the elderly are fundamentally the same as any age group. The elderly need affection and opportunity for social contact. They want approval of others. They want people to recognize their own personal dignity. They do not want to be singled out or pitied. They need friends. This need may be even greater to them now than in earlier years. They have probably lost many of their friends of long standing and need to be encouraged to take active part in selected social activities.

Clothing can help the elderly meet their psychological needs for affection and social contact. Being well dressed is essential for group participation at any age. An interest in personal appearance can give them self-confidence and make them more attractive to others.

Stylish clothes will help to keep the elderly from being set apart. Citizens in the silver years have a right to adequate and suitable clothing. Yet, a survey conducted in California shows clothing high on the list of unmet needs.

Unfortunately, the problem of dressing attractively is greater for the elderly than for younger people. Shopping becomes a problem. Physical changes limit their choice of styles and make shopping more difficult. One of the complaints of the older shopper is that stylish dresses that fit are hard to find.

Selecting Clothing

Clothing problems of people increase as they grow more elderly. They do not move about easily. The action range of their joints become limited, and their figure changes are not in keeping with available ready-made garments. In many ways their problems are similar to the hand-capped.

All clothing must be put on and taken off. It must be fastened and unfastened. It must allow for freedom of movement. It must stand up under everyday wear and tear. It must be cleaned.

Elderly people need easy on and off clothing so that they can dress themselves. Limited use of hands, arms and shoulders make dressing difficult. Clothing which is difficult to put on or take off discourages their desire to fix up. Independence builds courage; dependency builds discouragement. As the tendency "not to dress" grows, so does their withdrawal from society.

The personal needs of the elderly for dignity and acceptance by family and friends does not diminish with age. They need clothes that are attractive and at the same time provide comfort, mobility and ease of body movement. Because their body contours often differ from the standard figure for which ready-made garments were developed they need clothes with style lines that are attractive and comfortable.

Attractive and functional clothing can help them to maintain their dignity and at the same time can help to keep morale high.

Clothing that is easy to care for helps to keep the elderly looking their best. If the clothing is a type they can take care of themselves it increases their feeling of independence. If others must care for clothing, it lessens the burden of responsibility if the garments can be cleaned with ease.

Selecting an Elderly Person's Garments

Consider the individual; then look for attractive comfortable clothing that will be easy to put on and take off. Look for clothing that will clean easily and wear well.

What Makes a Garment Easy to Put On and Take Off?

Garment should have openings large enough to be put on and take off without a struggle. They will contain sufficient room at the arm-hole and waistline. The fasteners must be both easy to use and easy to reach.

Determine Which Fasteners To Use

The type, size and location of the fastener determines the ease with which it can be managed. Fasteners should be easy to see, reach and grasp. Usually, center front fasteners are easier to operate than those on side or back.

Zippers which pull up or down are the easiest to use. A tab on the zipper offers a handle to the user and makes the zipper easier to operate (Figure 1,a). An extra piece of cloth behind the zipper will serve as a guard and prevent snags.

Large flat buttons are easier to handle than are small fancy ones. Thread shanks make the buttons easier to grasp (Figure 1,d).

Magnetic fasteners require little skill to fasten. The magnet snaps the fastener together and separates with very little force (Figure 1,b).

Velcro tape requires a minimum of effort to open or close. (Figure 1,c) Velcro is two strips of nylon with rough surfaces that cling to each other. It may be used in strips or in small patch-like shapes (Figure 2). Velcro should not be exposed to high temperatures in washing or ironing. The tape should be closed during laundering because lint clings to the burr-like surface.

Hooks and eyes, if used, should be the large metal hook and bar type (Figure 1,e).

Grippers take more skill to close than to open (Figure 1,f).

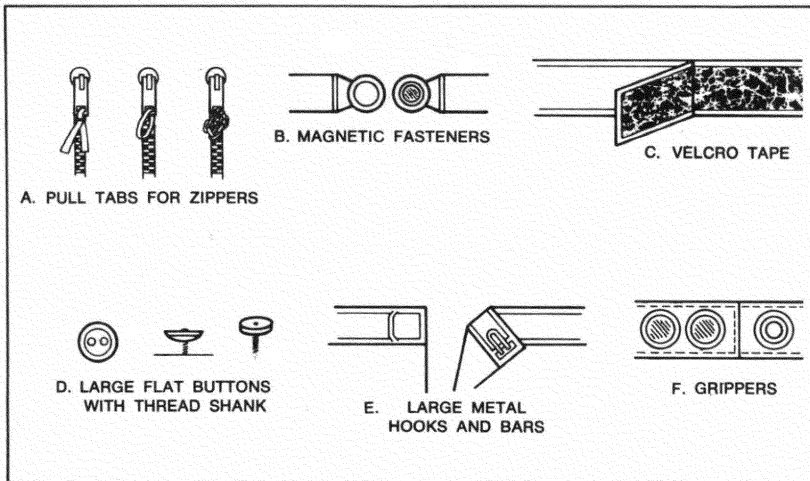


Figure 1. Easy to use fasteners.

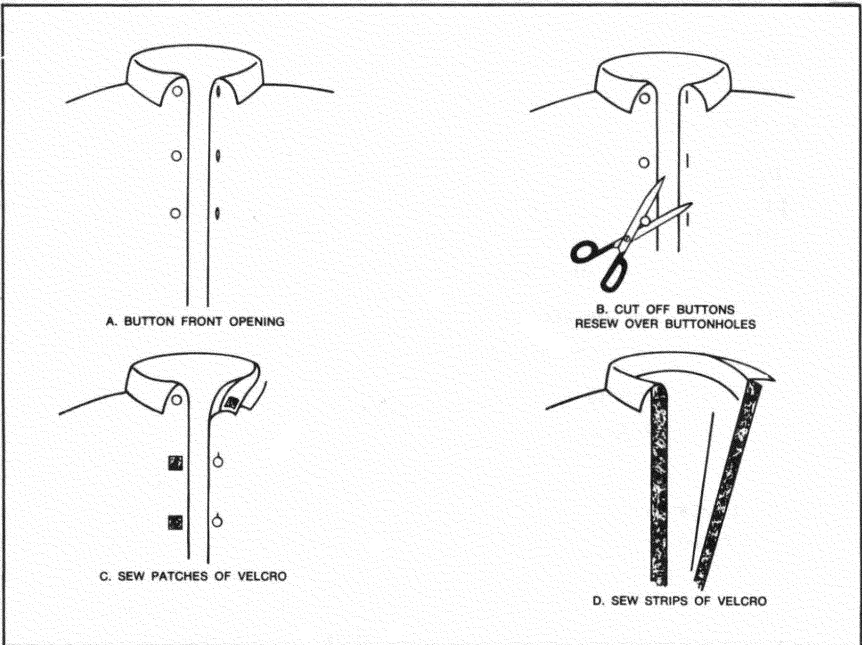


Figure 2. Converting man's shirt from button closing to velcro closure.

Other Convenience Features To Look For

Wrap around openings, flyfront zippers, or velcro openings are always preferred by older people (Figure 3).

Shortsleeves provide the user more freedom and are usually safer than long ones. However, elderly people are often cold natured and may prefer long or three-quarter sleeves.

When it is necessary to wear braces people find woven fabrics easier to put on than knits.

Slim skirts should be avoided as well as too full ones. Full skirts get in the way and slim ones may creep up.

Short length jackets, coats, or capes are less bulky for elderly people who sit a lot or who are confined to wheel chairs. It is important that coats give warmth without adding excessive weight.

Many ladies find the front closure bras and slips easier to put on (Figure 5 & 6).

Also girdles, should have extra zippers (Figure 7).

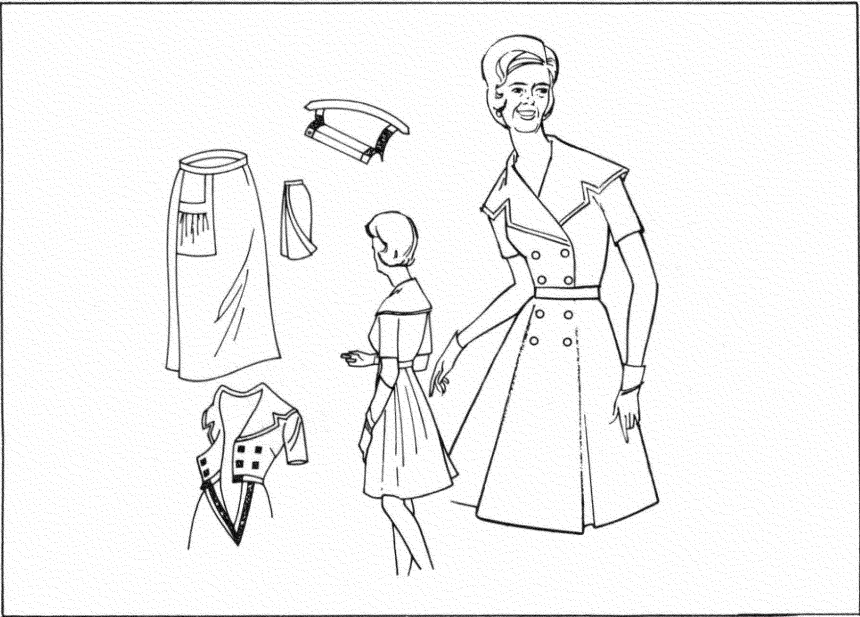


Figure 3. Wrap around skirt and dress with velcro closure tabs.



Figure 4. "My trouble is I get it completely filled and then I never know what to do with what's left over."

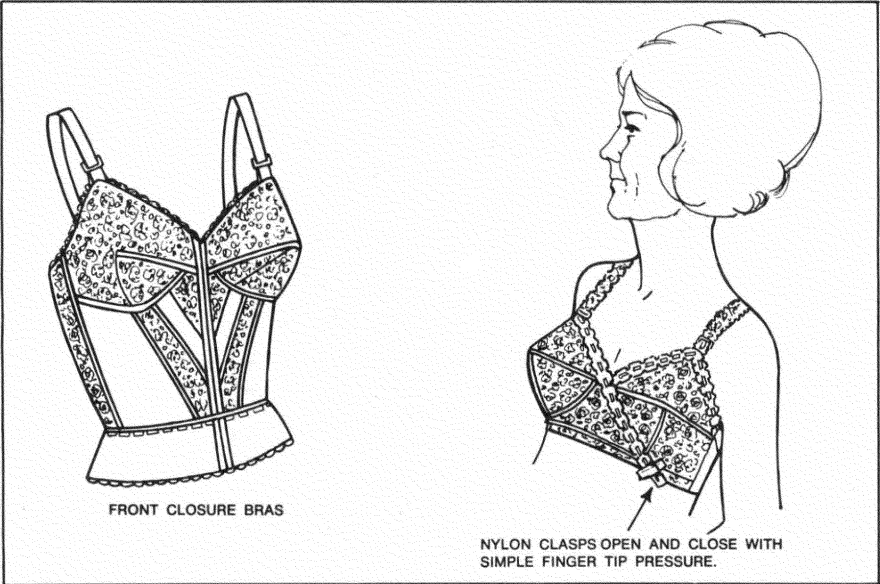


Figure 5. Front closure bras.

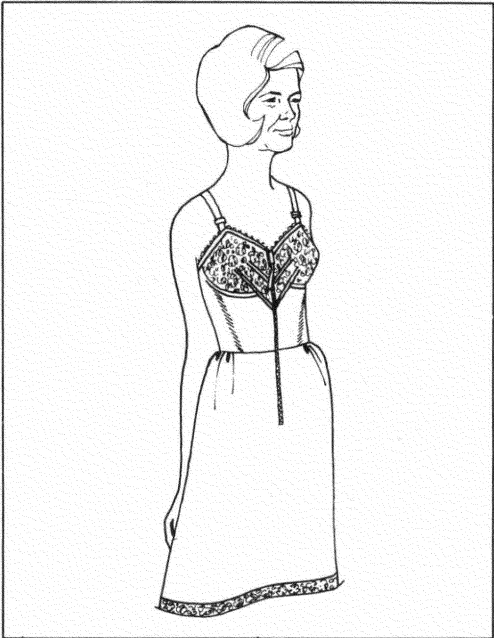


Figure 6. Front closure slip.

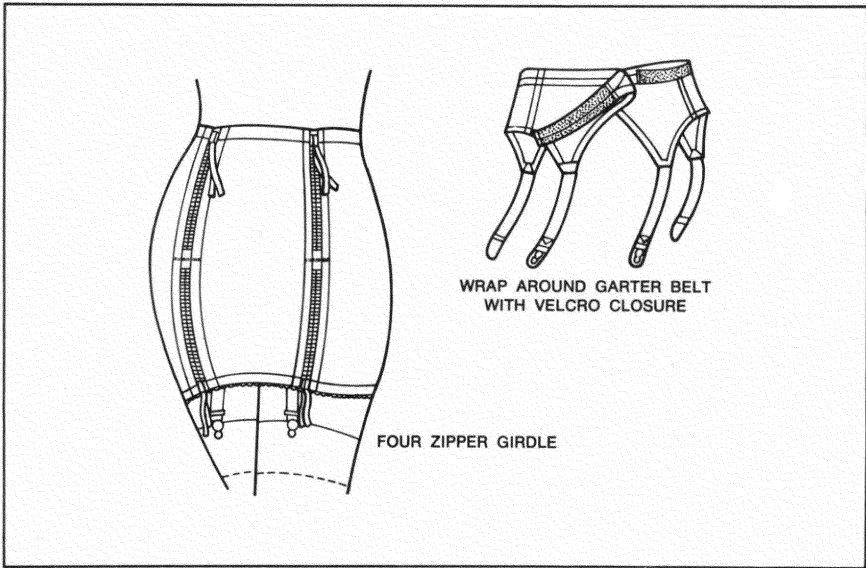


Figure 7. Girdle and garter belt.

Clothing Can Help One Look Their Best

Clothes can play up the person's good features. They lead the eye to an attractive feature. Use color, for color can bring added life to pallid skin. Do not let the color over-power the person, but experiment and find the hue and the shade that is most becoming.

If the body contours are obviously distorted from physical defects, look for styles that will disguise these irregularities. Shift styles and two piece dresses are good for the ladies. (Figures 8, 9, 10.)

Necklines can help draw attention to the face and away from figure defects. Soft folds, off center collars and smoke rings are excellent for emphasizing the face. In some cases, a collar may be a nuisance. For these, a top stitched facing may be the answer. Necklines should not bind or pull, but should hug the body. Skirt length should be in keeping with current fashion.

Making a Garment Comfortable

Comfortable clothes move with the body. They do not bind, nor are they so big that they do not "slip off" or "ride back." Examine how the garment is made. Action pleats, tucks and gussets give extra ease and freedom of movement (Figure 11). Knit fabrics provide ease that adds comfort to the garment.

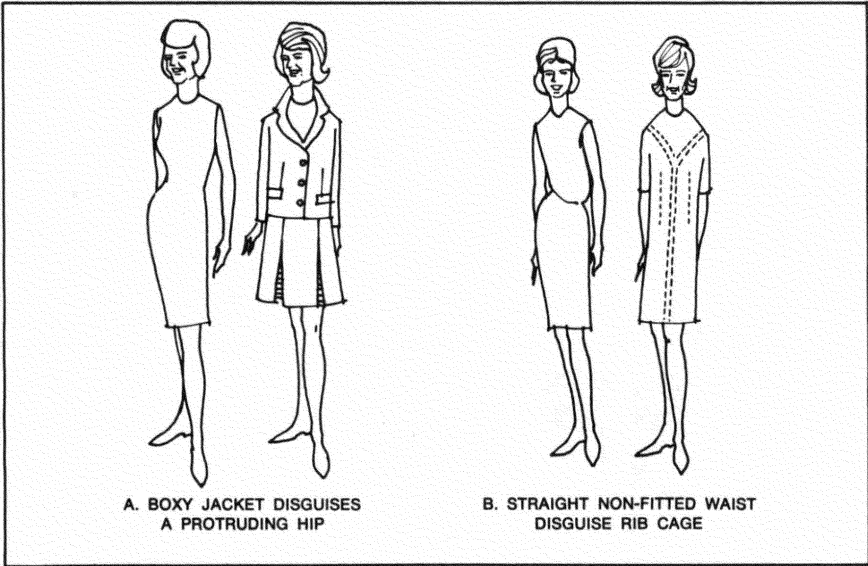


Figure 8. Play up good features by disguising irregularities.



Figure 9.

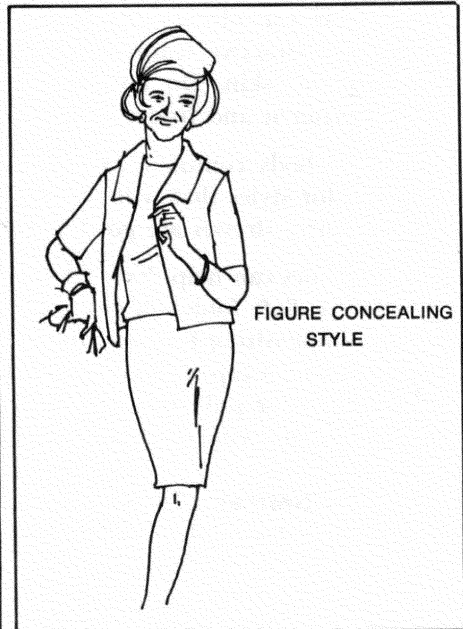


Figure 10.

Most garments look best and feel best when they fit well. Though most ready-made garments are available to some degree in proportioned sizes for both men and women, many older people still find difficulty in buying ready-made clothing. Alterations may be necessary to make the garment look well and feel comfortable.

Look for safety features and avoid full loose sleeves dangling ties, belts, scarfs and ornamental buttons. Loopy fabrics that catch on door handles and furniture and shoes and slippers with fancy ties or flaps should be avoided.

If the older person is troubled with incontinence, protective clothing must be considered. Each problem is different and must be met individually. A nurse or doctor should be consulted. Protective pants are available to help deal with this problem. (Figure 12).

Features Contributing to Wearability

Many factors enter into wearability. Fabric wear is influenced by the fiber (or blends of fiber), the type of construction and the finish. The manner in which the garment is made and the type of trim affects the wear of a garment. Since most elderly people are not very active, wear is not as important as comfort and ease of care.

Look for seams with small even stitches and adequate seam allowance. If necessary, reinforce areas of strain.

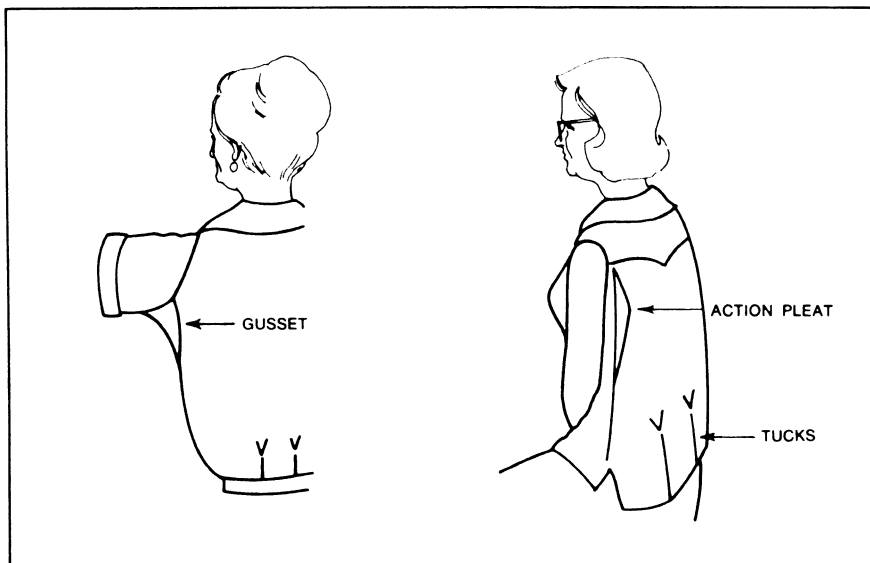


Figure 11. Select or alter your garments so they are comfortable.

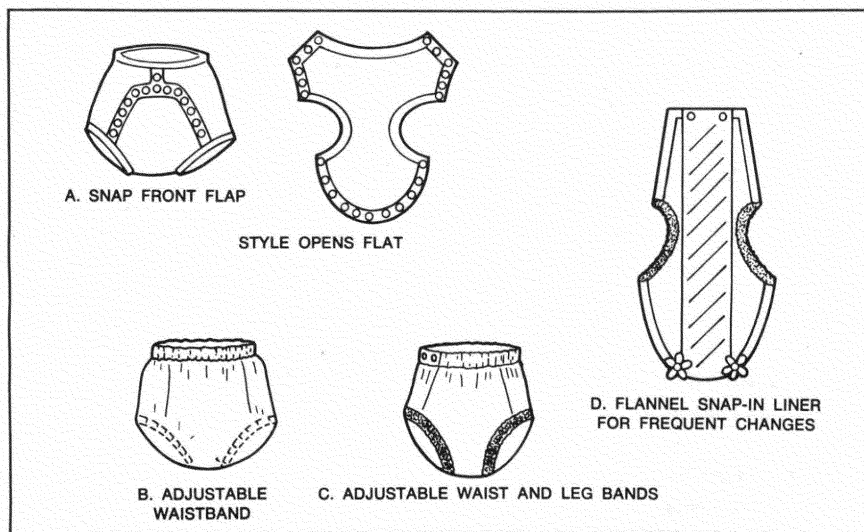


Figure 12. Special problems — incontinence.

The nature of the elderly person's handicap will determine the necessity of special attention to certain areas. Places such as underarm for crutches, leather patches at knees and elbows and hip for braces may require added alterations to give more life to the garment.

Making a Garment Easy to Care For

A garment's ease of care is determined by the fabric, design and construction. All three must be considered. The label is a good source of information. Such statements as "little or no ironing," "resists wrinkling," "permanent press," "color fast" and "sanforized" are clues to the type of care that can be expected. Many manufacturers have printed recommendations for care on the label.

These suggestions are very general. Before making any purchase, study the particular needs of the individual. The needs of the bedfast person are different from that of the person who can be up and about. The needs of the bedfast patient whose hands are still agile are different from the mobile elderly person whose hands are stiff with arthritis. Each individual has his particular needs. Guide your selection by asking yourself:

- Will it make dressing easier?
- Will it be attractive?
- Will it be comfortable?
- Can it be cared for easily?

Common Alteration

As a person grows older, the figure changes. The spinal column begins to bend, shoulders droop, head bows and fat moves downward. In ladies the sliding fat causes breasts to enlarge and their position to become lower. Deposits of abdominal fat grows larger so that abdomen and hips may become enormously extended. This may be accompanied by loss of fat in limbs and face. As age continues, the total amount of body fat decreases, and the body may become extremely thin.

Research shows that some of the body changes due to aging are:

1. Shortened shoulder length.
2. Shortened distance from waist over bust.
3. Lengthened distance from shoulder to waist over the shoulder blade.
4. Increased waist circumference.
5. Increased hip circumference.
6. Protruding abdomen.

Clothes that feel comfortable and look attractive must fit correctly. Proper fitting clothes gives a sense of well-being. You can forget them, knowing that you look your best.

Ready-made clothes come in a variety of proportioned sizes. It is important to know your figure type. This is true for both men and women.

One manufacturer of men's suits produces two-hundred and fifty individual specialty types from fourteen basic types. Another manufacturer has developed eighteen body types from six major body type groups.

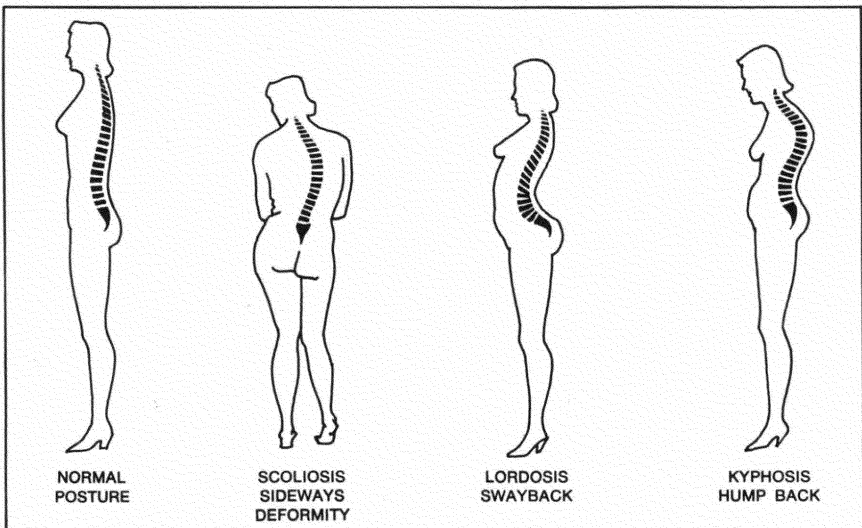


Figure 13. Back deformities common to old age.

Women's clothes are manufactured in different sizes and body types also. The standard for women's sizes was developed by the Commodity Standards Division of the United States of Commerce and the Women's Apparel Industry. It is known as Commercial Standard CS215-58. This system is designed from actual body measurements and the relationship of one part of the body to the other. It is based on three height groups (tall, regular and short) and three bust-hip groups for each height (slender, average and full). In the bust-hip group, the bust remains constant and the hip type varies. The bust designates the size. The body type is based on bust-hip relationship and height. There are four classifications of women's sizes.

Junior — Size Range 7 to 19:

For the youthful, shortwaisted figure with a small, high bustline that is more developed than a teen; a small defined waist; a curved rounded hip line.

Half Size — Size Range 8½ to 24½:

For a mature, shortwaisted figure with fuller bust, waist and hip line than the junior.

Misses — Size Range 8 to 22:

For a youthful, well proportioned figure slightly fuller through the hips; longer waisted than juniors. *Tall* sizes are for misses 5'6" to 5'11" tall with longer waist and skirt length. *Petite* sizes are for misses 5'3" tall or under with shorter waist and skirt lengths.

Women's — Size Range 28 to 42:

For a mature, well proportioned figure fuller through bust, waist and hips; longer waisted than misses. *Tall* sizes are for women 5'6" to 5'11" tall with longer waist and skirt lengths. *Larger* sizes are for women 5'4" to 5'6½" tall with fuller arms, abdomen, upper body and waist.

This is a voluntary standard. It has been endorsed by a large segment of the apparel industry. It is still necessary to try clothes on as each manufacturer has his own body line, but a woman who knows her size and body type will find shopping much easier.

Knowing how clothes should fit is important whether you plan to make the alterations yourself or have someone do it for you. A well fitting garment will never show any strain on the crosswise or lengthwise grainlines. It should conceal rather than reveal figure faults. A garment that is too tight will not only be uncomfortable, but it will make you look larger. A garment that is too large will give a dowdy, tired look.

Keep in mind that alterations in ready-made garments are limited. Garments made at home can be "cut to size" by altering the pattern

WOMEN

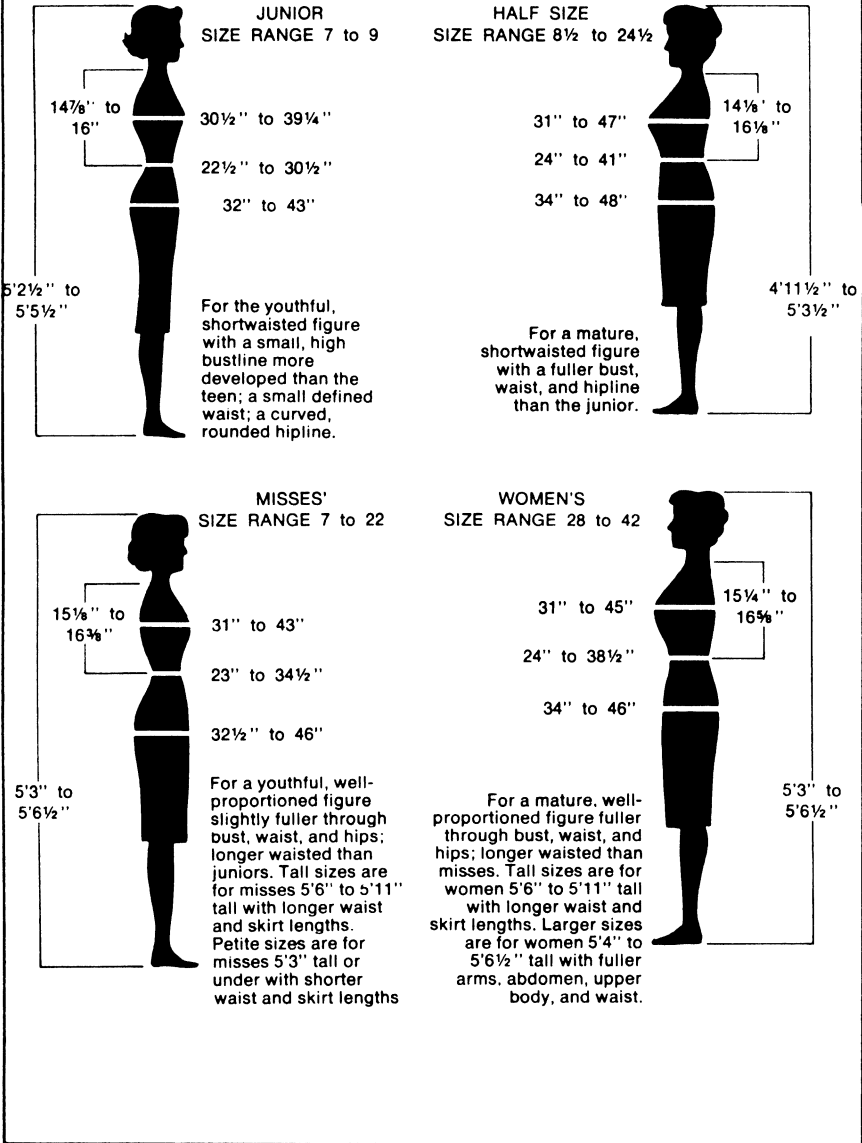
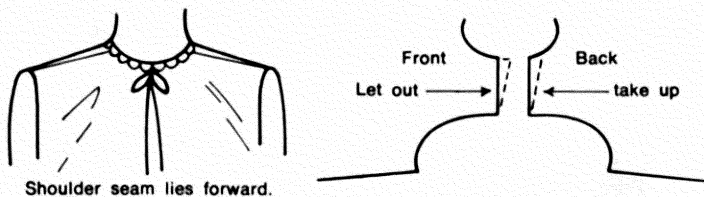


Figure 14. Classifications of women's sizes.

before the garment is cut out. But, in ready-made garments the alterations must be made within the existing seams. Seams can be taken in, but there may not be sufficient material in the seams to let a garment out. Stitches and press marks may show when seams are let out. The style of the garment will determine how much altering can be done. Too many alterations are always questionable.

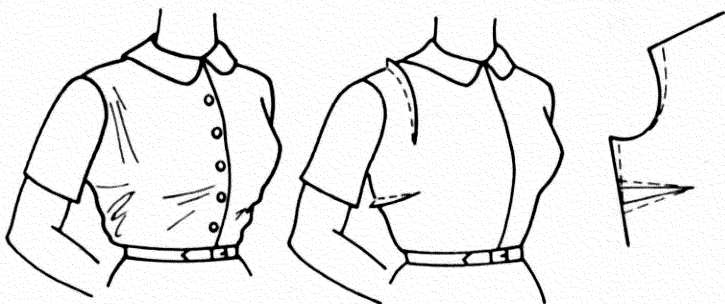
Waistline, side seams, and hems are the common alteration problems. Shoulder length and sleeve length are next. Since busts and waists of the elderly figure are often large in comparison to the rest of the body, shoulder and necklines often require some altering. These are difficult alterations and may not always be satisfactory. The low bustline of the mature figure requires alteration of the bust darts.

Examples of Alterations



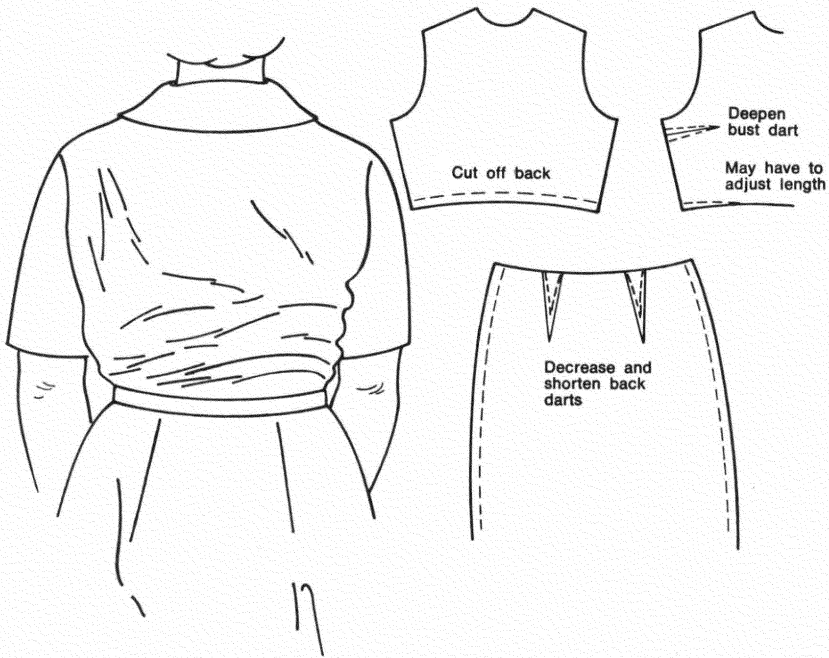
PROBLEM: Rounded shoulders cause shoulder seam to lie too far forward.

ALTERATION: Let out front seam as much as possible and take up back seam.



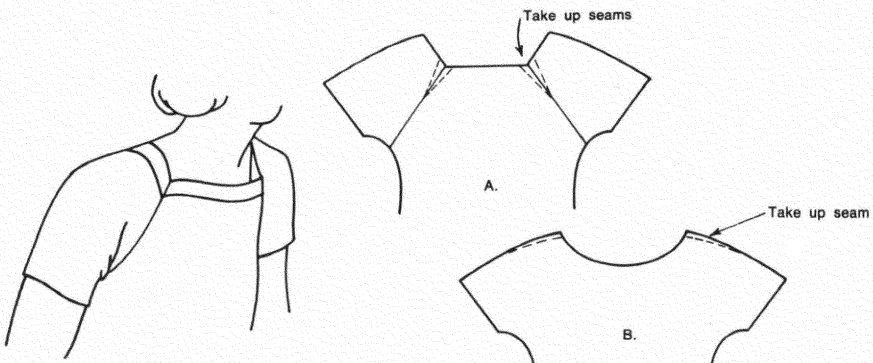
PROBLEM: Dress fits through bust. Waist length correct in front. Shoulder width too wide, and the dress droops under bust.

ALTERATION: Pin vertical tuck across shoulder until dress shoulder width is correct. Deepen horizontal dart to remove the "droop" under the bust. Rip sleeve off. Open right side and shoulder seams of blouse. Unpin vertical tuck on left side; lay the right side still tucked over it. Using the tucked side as a pattern, trim the excess fabric from the left side. Then, unpin the tuck on the right side and use the trimmed left side as a pattern and cut the right side. Stitch the deepened horizontal dart along the pins.



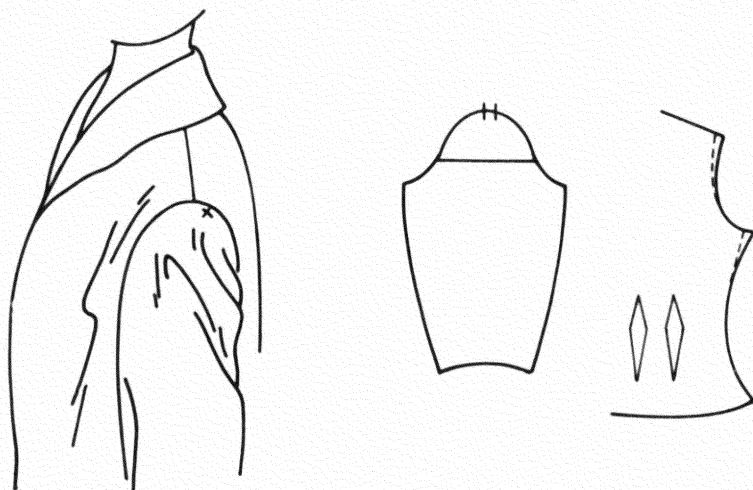
PROBLEM: Full busted figure. Dress fits in front, but too much length in back. Darts in skirt too long and too deep.

ALTERATION: Cut off excess length. Use care to not remove the ease that is necessary for comfort. Blouse front side seam will have to be adjusted to match back. Since figure has full bust, the front dart may be deepened (or small one added). May still be necessary to cut some from bodice bottom.



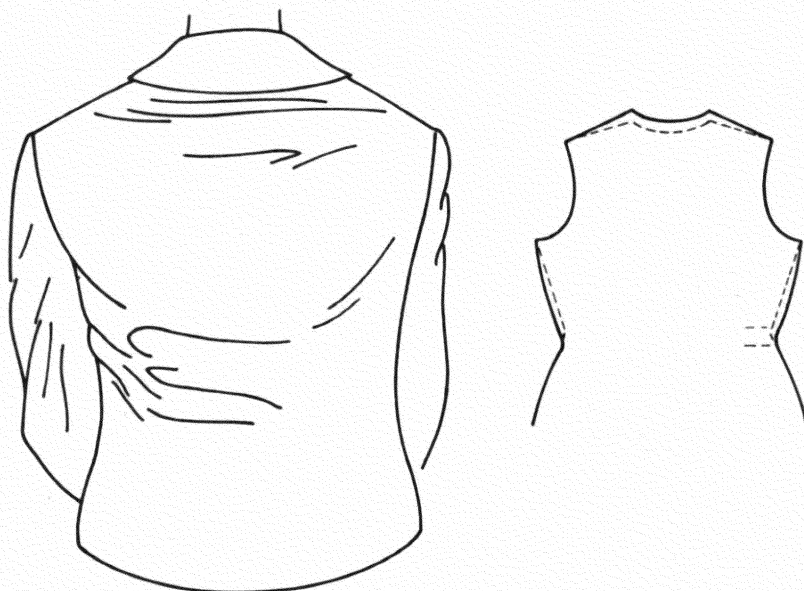
PROBLEM: Round shoulders and narrow chest. Neck opening gaps.

ALTERATION: Deepen arm seams at corners as in A or deepen shoulder seam at neck edge as in B.

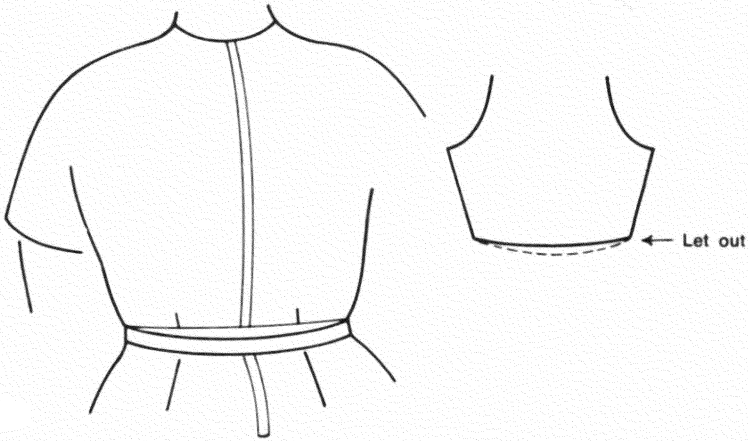


PROBLEM: Grainline in sleeve drops to back in sleeve. Sleeve needs to come forward. Front shoulder is too wide.

ALTERATION: Trim off excess fabric as shown; ease sleeve forward.

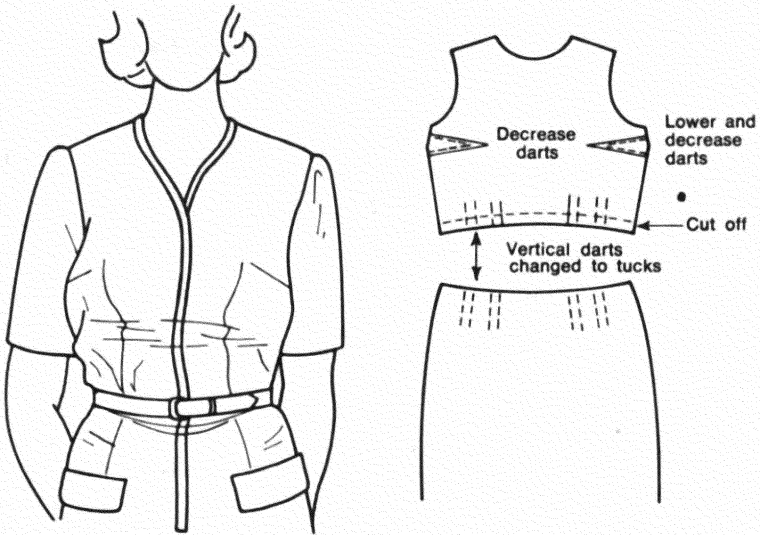


PROBLEM: Back has too much length, and waistline is too low for this figure. Cut off fabric as shown. *Note*—This suit requires excessive alteration. It would be expensive. It would be wise to consider another suit.



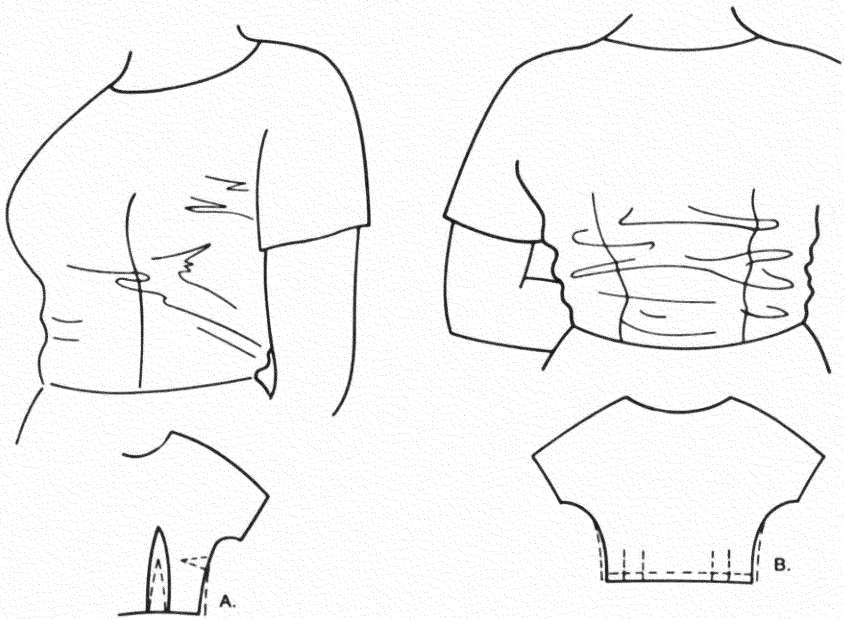
PROBLEM: Round shoulder causes bodice back to be short waisted.

ALTERATION: Let out waistline seam at lower edge of bodice back. May have to face seam. Wide belt might hide the short waist look.



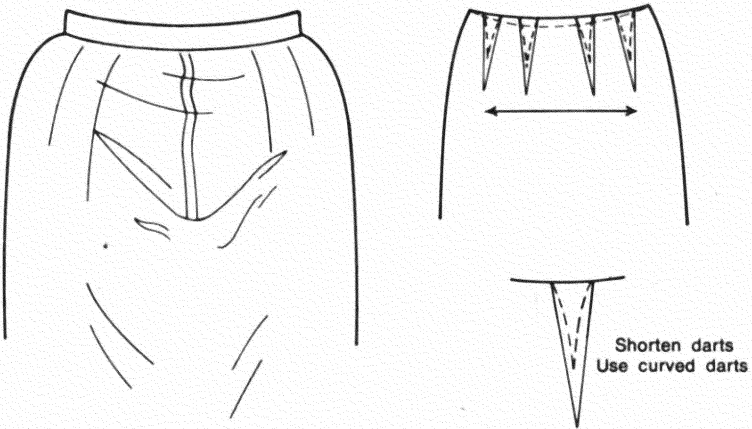
PROBLEM: Low, small bust. Bodice too full and too long. Darts are too deep for this figure. Horizontal darts are too high and vertical darts too long. Waistline falls below belt. Skirt seems to be a little tight.

ALTERATION: Lower horizontal dart, and make it narrower. Change vertical darts to short tucks. Cut off front of bodice so waistline of dress will be at natural waistline of the body. Use care that you do not lose lengthwise ease of the bodice. Change long dart in skirt front to short tucks. This will give ease and will correspond to new tucks in altered bodice.



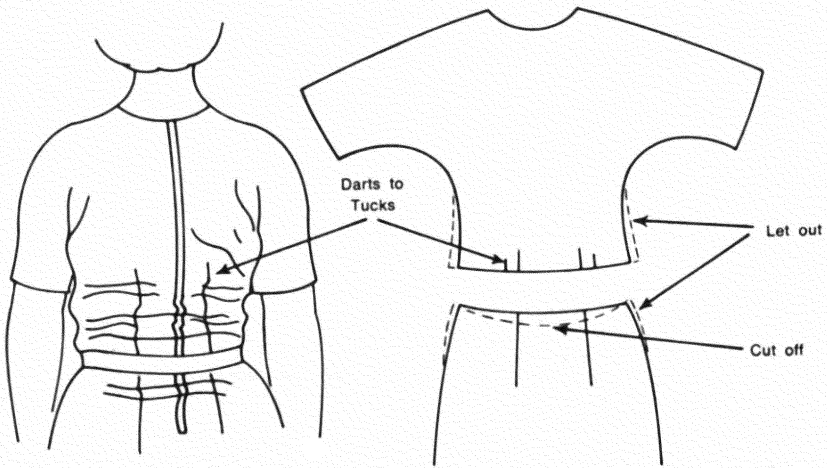
PROBLEM: Figure with prominent bust and short back. Bodice darts too long.

ALTERATION: Release side seams. Shorten front darts. Make straight dart rather than curved dart. (Released tucks could be used.) Add small horizontal bust dart. Change back darts to short tucks. Cut off back length.



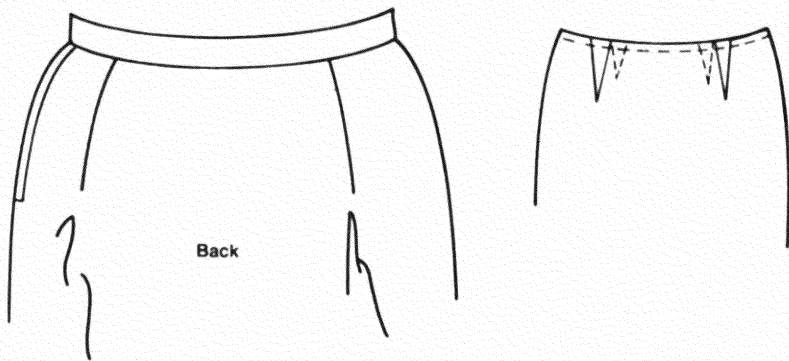
PROBLEM: Flat derriere, skirt droops, and grainline curves downward. Darts too long and too deep. Figure has small waist and pad of fat over each hip.

ALTERATION: Shorten and decrease darts. Curved darts would probably be better for this figure than straight darts. Cut skirt off at waist back so that grainline will be raised.



PROBLEM: Short waist figure, slight sway back, bodice too snug, back too long, and vertical darts too long.

ALTERATION: Let out side seams for more width. Change vertical darts to short tucks. Cut off skirt at center back.



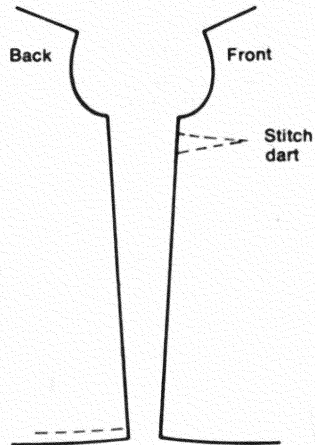
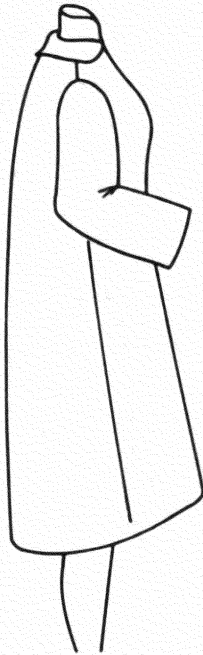
PROBLEM: Darts too far apart and too long. Releases fullness too low. Skirt wasn't given enough ease when band was attached.

ALTERATION: Decrease darts and move them nearer to center. Ease extra fullness into band.



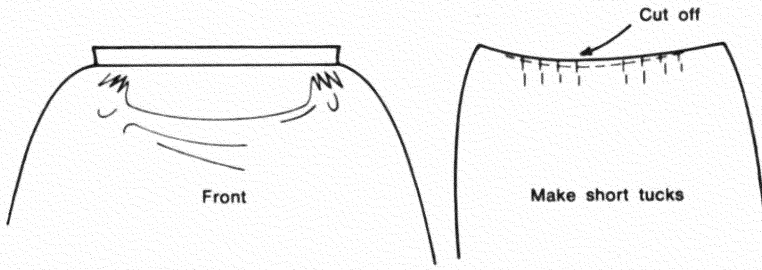
PROBLEM: Large upper arm.

ALTERATION: Let out seam if sufficient fabric is available in seam. But, it is doubtful enough ease could be obtained to make the sleeve comfortable. If this was a lined jacket, the expense would be even greater. Doubtful if alteration would be practical.



PROBLEM: Full bust is causing side seam to swing to the front.

ALTERATION: Deepen front dart or add dart if none is there. Shorten back so that back side seams will match front.



PROBLEM: Deep fold runs from one set of gathers to the other. Grainline drops at this point.

Summary

Alterations may be the fitter's business, but it is your concern too. Be alert to grainlines. Know when the fitting problem is due to off-grain cutting. Garments cut off-grain will never fit anyone. Know whether or not the alterations suggested are practical and are worth the cost, for the cost must be taken into the total price of the garment.

Buy your correct size and figure type. This will lessen the number of alterations needed. Remember; comfort, quality, and appearance are dependent on how well a garment fits.

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Author of this publication, Marjorie Y. Baker, is Extension clothing specialist at Oklahoma State University.