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Do Clothes Make the Workout?



Athletic apparel is marketed to enhance your performance — but is it a gimmick or can the clothes actually help your performance? Here's a rundown on two popular fitness wear trends and the research behind them.

Compression Clothing

Compression pants and shirts are made from fabrics such as polyester and spandex. Compression athletic apparel is designed to increase blood flow to muscles, ultimately activating them externally. When muscles are squeezed from the outside, resistance is created to help exercisers burn more calories and improve muscle tone.

Think compression clothing could give your workout a boost? Maybe, but maybe not. A recent study tested a leading brand of capri toning pants. Researchers found that the pants didn't significantly activate muscles more than regular athletic shorts. However, the researchers determined that if wearing toning pants makes you think you look better, you may be more likely to exercise. Think about wear and tear as well. Higher quality pants, compression or not, will hold up to numerous, repeated trips through the wash — all while retaining their color and integrity, especially through the waistband. Sagging and fading is not something you want in your athletic attire.

Give Good Shoes a Run for the Money

All shoes are not created equal. Choose your shoe according to your activity and your foot. For example, running shoes are great for running, but since they don't offer much lateral support, they may not be ideal for athletic pursuits that involve a lot of side-to-side movements like tennis. Cross trainers can be a good choice if your routine includes an activity like aerobics, weight training or kickboxing (basically any exercise on a hard surface that involves side-to-side movement).

If you have low-arched feet (also called "flat" feet), seek out shoes that provide greater heel control and support in the mid-foot region. Individuals with higher arches tend to need shoes with more cushioning for greater shock absorption. Having the right shoes can help prevent pain and reduce the risk of injury. You can also go to some specialty sport stores and have your gait analyzed to help determine the best shoe for you.

Sources: *American Council on Exercise; Real Simple*