

Clothing Ideas for People with Back Irregularities

Few people have what others might call a “perfect figure” or “fabulous physique.” But, when a person’s body form is very different from that of others, it may affect one’s self-image so much that he or she does not feel at ease when participating in the usual activities of life. Some of this feeling may come from being unable to find fashionable clothes that fit.

This publication suggests clothing ideas for individuals with exaggerated irregularities of the spine due to injury or other causes. Such irregularities include lordosis (inward curvature of the spine, A), kyphosis (outward curvature, B), and scoliosis (lateral curvature, C).

If you have, or someone you know has, one of these problems, you may be able to select or help select clothing that creates the illusion of balance. You may be able to improve your appearance by selecting garments with design features that minimize the problem or by choosing clothes that can be altered easily for a good fit. By choosing design features that emphasize the opposite side of an outfit, attention can be drawn away from the irregularity.

Lordosis

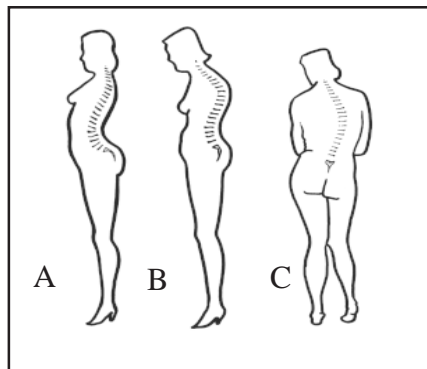
Inward curvature of the spine at the lower back causes a hollow at the back waist. The upper back may be rounded and the derriere raised,

depending on the degree of the curvature. Lordosis is commonly called swayback when the curvature is not extreme.

Closely fitted skirts, dresses, and pants won’t fit well. The back of the garment may bunch up around the waist, skirts may hike up in back and hang unevenly with side seams swinging toward the back.

Clothing ideas to try for inward curvature are:

- two-piece outfits with tops or jackets that hang straight rather than being fitted at the waist;
- straight-cut or flared dresses or jumpers with little or no shaping at the waist that can hide the hollow area of the back;
- skirts with gathers or unstitched pleats at the waist that can be hemmed to be level with the floor;
- blousy tops with fullness at the waist from gathers or open tucks;
- full straight dresses with a belted waistline;



- empire style (high waist) dresses or jumpers with gathered or pleated fullness;
- pants cut with fuller styling;
- loose-fitting knits.

Knits stretch more than wovens to accommodate irregularities, but should not fit skin tight or they will emphasize the problem.

Alterations. Someone with clothing skills can alter clothing to fit better.

Try this:

- Remove wrinkles below the waist in the back of skirts and pants by taking out the waistline seam from side seam to side seam. Raise the back of the skirt or pants until the garment lies flat. Mark the new waistline location on the garment with pins or chalk. Trim away excess fabric. Restitch bodice and skirt together or replace waistband of skirt or pants.

Kyphosis

Outward curvature of the spine or kyphosis, often referred to as hump-back, may affect any part of the spine, but is usually confined to the high back.

A pronounced outward curvature may cause hems on jackets, over-blouses, and dresses to pull up in back. Also, the chest may appear hollow because garments are often too long at center front if purchased with the desired back length.

Designs to try that tend to camouflage the rounded back are:

- blousy easy-fitting tops and shirts with fullness both above and below the waist from gathers or open tucks;
- shaped or curved yoke-style shirts, tops, or dresses;
- raglan sleeves that provide easier fit;
- draped cowl necklines in front or shawl collars;
- a soft bow tie at the neck or ruffled front closure for balance;
- empire style dresses and jumpers;
- swing or tent style garments that drape from the shoulders and fasten in front with no waistline seam;
- two-piece outfits such as camp-style shirts to mix and match with pants or shirts;
- stretchy knit sweaters rather than tailored jackets.

Designs to avoid are:

- princess styles, unless they are custom made;
- print fabrics with directional designs;
- plaids or horizontal stripes — the back curve will pull them out of line and call attention to the curve.

Alterations

• Adjust hems to be parallel to the floor to improve appearance. This means shortening the front and at the same time lengthening the back. The same principle applies whether it is a jacket, top, skirt, or full-length coat or dress. This alteration may not be possible if a jacket fits in the shoulders and circumference, but is not long enough in the back and has a narrow hem.

• If a dress has a blousy top with a waistline seam, the bodice can be shortened in center front and tapered to the greatest possible length at center back. Afterward, the skirt may not need altering and the chest may appear less hollow.

Scoliosis

Lateral curvature of the spine (scoliosis) causes one side of the back to be more prominent than the other. The shoulder and hip may be higher on one side, but not necessarily. The trunk of the body is shortened and the waist may slant to one side.

Teen and pre-teen girls with scoliosis may wear a Milwaukee brace to straighten the spine while the bones are still flexible. In other cases, a rod is surgically inserted in the back. Finding clothes to fit with a Milwaukee brace is often a challenge.

Clothing ideas to try when no brace is worn are:

- blousy easy-fitting tops in longer lengths to accommodate the long side of the body;
- shirts with yokes and back fullness or pleats for extra room on the side when it is needed;
- adding extra shoulder padding to the lower shoulder of jackets; removing some of it from the higher one;
- raglan or kimono sleeves for comfort and appearance;
- elastic waistbands that tend to adjust easily to body contours.

Designs to avoid are:

- close fitting garments;
- straight cut tops, jackets, coats;
- low cut necklines that will slip off the low shoulder;
- fabrics with definite horizontal designs—stripes and plaids;
- set-in sleeves.

Alterations. For tailored skirts and pants, waistline seams may need adjustment. The same principle is used that was described for lordosis. The garment is purchased to fit the longer side; the excess fabric is removed from the waistline of the shorter side of the body. The widest part to be removed will be at the side seam. Avoid buying garments such as dresses or skirts with zippers on the side, because the zipper will need to be taken out and replaced.

Clothing ideas when a brace is worn: A Milwaukee brace covers much of the torso. Clothing will be more satisfactory if it:

- fits loosely;
- has elasticized or no waistline;
- has necklines that open wide (examples are stretchy turtlenecks, T-shirts with stretch neck bands, convertible collars that stand away from the neck);
- stretches easily for ease in dressing (knits, stretch-woven fabrics, or those containing spandex);
- has good abrasion resistance to resist rubbing of the brace (blends of cotton, polyester, or nylon).

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Prepared by Janis Stone, extension textiles and clothing professor, with Mol Hom, extension work-study student, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011-1120.

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