

“You think a pair of pants that fits all three of you is going to fit [slaps hips] all of this?”

America Ferrara as Carmen in *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*

the pants handbook

How to find a pair of trousers that will fit and flatter your unique shape.

“SHE PUTS HER PANTS ON one leg at a time, just like everybody else.” You’ve heard the saying. When someone is so highly esteemed that she seems almost superhuman, the phrase reminds us that she, too, still has to wake up and shimmy—one leg at a time—into a pair of trousers. Putting on pants, it seems, is the great, unglamorous equalizer. To make this process less painful, *Real Simple* identified the best pant styles for various body types, then polled real women to identify any remaining tricky questions when it comes to trousers. From there, stylists, personal shoppers, tailors, and designers weighed in with real solutions for every problem. Consider this story an inside-the-seams look at your bottom, soon-to-be-better half.

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your real-life questions, answered

Real Simple asked women of all shapes and sizes to share their specific gripes about finding pants that fit. Read on if you've ever complained about pants that gape at the waist, pull at the thighs, or create the notorious muffin top.



Q. Where exactly should my pant hem hit?

> To create the longest possible line, pants should be an inch from the floor, with the hem breaking over the instep.

> One option is to buy two pairs of the same pants and hem one for heels and the other for flats, but you can fudge a happy medium by wearing the same pair of pants with flats and up to a two-inch kitten heel—but no higher, suggests Allison Berlin, founder of the New York fashion-consulting firm Style Made Simple.

> When switching from heels to flats, a quick fix is Zakkerz (\$27, www.zakkerz.com), which secure rolled-up cuffs using magnets.

Q. My pants fit everywhere but at the waist, where they gape. How can I fix this?

> Because gaping usually results from having fuller hips and a slim waist, the key is to find low-rise pants that start at the hips (so you don't have to worry about fitting both waist and hips) or that have a "contoured waistband that is slightly higher in the back than in the front," says Lisa Converse, vice president of design for White House Black Market.

> Go to a tailor. "He should be able to make affordable adjustments," says Gregg Andrews, a fashion director with Nordstrom.

> Another trick: Isabelt (\$17 to \$20, www.isabelt.com), which cinches the waist the way a regular belt does but lies flat and undetectable under tops.

Q. I have wide hips and a belly. Which type of pants will flatter me?

> Try bootcut pants (to balance your hips) paired with a two-inch waistband (to contain your stomach), says June Ambrose, author of *Effortless Style* (Simon & Schuster, \$20).

> Forgo low-rise pants in favor of a rise that hits an inch or two below the navel. Gap's Curvy Fit meets these criteria, says Berlin. Another option: New York & Company's City Knit pants, which offer generous stretch in the hips.

> Steer clear of tab closures and belts, which add bulk, and slanted (diagonal) pockets, which accentuate hips.



Q. I'm curvy and short. Which styles work for me?

- > Head to the petites department. In particular, try Ann Taylor and Banana Republic petites, as these lines understand the dimensions of smaller frames.
- > “Stay away from pleats, cuffs, and tapered or cropped legs, which shorten and widen the frame,” says Gretta Monahan, a cohost of *Tim Gunn’s Guide to Style*, on Bravo TV.
- > Finally, don’t forget heels. “Pointy-toe heels in a shade that matches your pants will make your figure look extra long and lean,” says Finola Hughes, host of *How Do I Look?* on the Style Network.

Q. Pants pull at my thighs but fit elsewhere. What do I do?

- > Invest in wide-leg bootcuts or stovepipe trousers, which will balance out your legs from top to bottom, suggests Dawn Baker, a former stylist and the owner of the Los Angeles boutique Happy LA. Otherwise, she says, pants will cling to saddlebags. She suggests Raven Tailored trousers to flatter this figure.
- > “Be cautious of too much stretch—anything over 4 percent,” warns Patty Fox, chief creative officer for MyShape.com, a website that specializes in fitting body types. (Check the garment label for elastane or spandex.) “A firm fabric holds you in better because it doesn’t pull,” she says.
- > Skip flared cuts—they make knees look skinny and thighs bigger.

Q. A low rise reveals too much, and a high rise looks dumpy. What’s a happy medium?

- > Look for the universally flattering midrise sweet spot, which is one to two inches below the navel, or just below where your waist begins to indent.
- > Use what you wear on top to complement (or camouflage) the stomach area. “Partner low-rise pants with a longer shirt that hits at the hip bone,” says Andrews.
- > “Try Tory Burch slacks, which are appropriately modest but still look modern,” says Sharon Weil, head of the personal-shopping service for Saks Fifth Avenue.



Q. All my pants give me the dreaded muffin top.

- > Try a higher rise. A low rise often starts three inches or more below the navel, so any soft flesh there will spill over.
- > Similarly, if pants are too small, the waistband can bind your skin. Stacy London, a cohost of TLC's *What Not to Wear*, points to junior sizes (any odd-number size) and trendy, contemporary looks (think Rampage and Bongo) as possible culprits and suggests replacing them with cuts for grown-ups, such as those from DKNY.
- > Pair existing problem pants with tanks with control panels to whittle your middle. Try Yummie Tummie (www.yummietummie.com).
- > Wear long, fluid tops to mask your muffiny midsection.



Q. What is the best length for cropped pants?

- > If you want sleek, Audrey Hepburn cigarette pants, this narrow style should graze the ankles, says Berlin, who points to Theory's sophisticated crops as the proper length.
- > Going shorter? "Try styles that hit at the narrowest zone between calf and ankle, where the shin starts to indent," says Monahan.
- > While tall women can afford to go even shorter (think Capris and pedal pushers), these styles make petites look squatty. "Try Bermuda shorts instead," says London.
- > As for wide-leg crops, says London, "they have their place in the world, but it's on a beach or in a country house."



Q. My rear is high and round, but my legs are slim. Which cuts will suit me?

- > Look for darting in the back, which makes room for a rounder bottom without causing the seat to look baggy.
- > Choose pants with back pockets, as pairs without pockets often create a "unibum."
- > Remember that pocket size should be relative to your backside, says Andrews. A large bottom calls for large pockets.
- > Try a bootcut style, which may help make a full rear seem more proportionate to slim legs.
- > Look for labels like Baby Phat and Apple Bottoms, which are cut for bodies with fuller behinds and skinny legs, says Ambrose. Fox also recommends Austin Reed trousers.

what to know if you have a tummy

Do you tend to gain weight around your middle but remain comparatively thin in other places, like your hips and thighs? Look for these features.

pockets.....

Stay away from horizontal or vertical versions, which add bulk at the waist. Go for pants with angled pockets or none at all.

rise.....

Choose either a midrise (one to two inches below the navel), to hold you in, or a low rise that sits just under the stomach, so the waistband can sit on your hips without squeezing your middle.

leg.....

A skinny or straight style distracts the eye from the midsection by playing up your slim legs.



waistband

The band should be plain, flat, and unfussy to avoid drawing attention to your midsection. A contoured waistband (one higher in the back than in the front) is a good way to accentuate a waistline.

fabric

A high-quality stretch cotton or a woven polyester-spandex blend provides a structured yet flexible fit.

TRY: Gap Straight Stretch-Cotton Pants (shown), \$54.50.
TO BUY: The Gap, 877-415-4551.

OTHER GOOD BRANDS FOR YOUR BODY TYPE

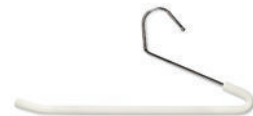
- DKNY
- Liz Claiborne
- Michael Michael Kors
- Tommy Hilfiger

HOW TO... hang your pants

Here are some of *Real Simple's* favorite tools.



BEST CLAMP
Beechwood Hanger, \$7
TO BUY: www.containerstore.com.



BEST OPEN-BAR
Friction Trouser Hanger, \$6 for three
TO BUY: www.gracioushome.com.



BEST CLIP
Friction Hanger, \$6 for three
TO BUY: www.bedbathandbeyond.com.

> smarty-pants trivia

On No Pants Day, observers of this holiday trade in their trousers for, well, not much. It usually occurs on the first Friday in May in Austin, Texas, and Boise, Idaho, among other cities. However, a New York City performance-art group celebrates in January by wearing boxers on the subway.

what to know if you have a straight figure

Consider yourself boy-shaped? These curve-creating details provide just enough *oomph* to straight-up-and-down types.



hips.....●

The cut should be narrow and close-fitting.

A straight figure is liable to drown in a loose-fitting style.

fabric.....●

Pants with a bit of spandex will hug the body to make it look more shapely. A textured fabric, such as tweed, will add more definition to a thin, boyish silhouette.

leg.....●

Typically, any leg style will work for this figure, but a slim silhouette with a slight bootcut is the most flattering.

waistband

The wide waistband, angled belt loops, and slanted pockets help create the look of a nipped-in waistline. To further define the waist, consider adding an interesting belt or scarf.

rise

The pants should be low-slung on the hips (about three inches below the navel) to create the illusion of an hourglass figure.

TRY: Express Editor Pant (shown), \$79.50.
TO BUY: Express, 877-415-4551.

OTHER GOOD BRANDS FOR YOUR BODY TYPE

- Diane von Furstenberg
- Elie Tahari
- French Connection
- Zara



HOW TO...

wash your pants

FOR DRY-CLEAN ONLY

■ Make sure your trousers are soft-pressed. Over-pressing creates unsightly shine marks and will shorten the life of the garment.

■ Inform the dry cleaner if you prefer a crease or not, since creases can be impossible to remove on some fabrics, particularly cotton.

■ If the pants contain spandex, notify your cleaner so that he knows to run them on a short cycle.

■ When you get home, remove the plastic, as it won't allow the fabric to breathe. But leave the paper shoulder cover on the hanger to keep the pants dust-free.

FOR MACHINE-WASHABLE

■ Turn them inside out to reduce fading and protect the buttons and hardware.

■ Follow the care label. In general, it's best to wash pants in cold on a gentle cycle and let them air-dry to prevent shrinking.

> smarty-pants trivia

The average woman owns eight pairs of casual pants (excluding jeans), according to Cotton Incorporated.

what to know if you have wide hips

Calling all pear shapes! If you are proportionately larger around the hips and thighs than on top, the following features will provide the right balance.



HOW TO...

iron a pair of pants

Note: Pleated pants are best left to a dry cleaner. To iron flat-front trousers:

STEP 1: Turn the pants inside out, then lay the pockets flat and iron them. Adjust the temperature setting to the proper material.

STEP 2: Turn the pants right-side out and slip the waistband around the small end of the board. Rotate the pants around the board as you iron.

STEP 3: Place one pant leg directly on top of the other, inseams aligned. Fold back the top leg and iron the inside of the bottom leg to the crotch, then flip the pants over and iron the outside. If you prefer no crease, iron just out to the edges.

STEP 4: To set a crease down the front, align the inseams, then hold the iron a few inches away from the legs and give them a burst of steam along the edge.

> smarty-pants trivia

Women were limited to skirts and dresses until the 1920s, when French designer Coco Chanel broke tradition and introduced ladies to the ease of trousers.



rise

A low rise (three inches below the navel) or a mid-rise (one to two inches below) is the most slimming. A rise that hits at the natural waistline will make your hips look larger in comparison with your waist.

knee

Avoid bootcut styles that are extremely fitted around the knee, then flare out drastically (think bell-bottoms). When the cut around the knee is so fitted, your hips and thighs look wider. Instead, the thigh should gradually taper toward the knee, then slowly flare from the knee to the ankle.

leg

A wide or slightly flared bottom balances the hips and creates a vertical line from hips to floor. Avoid a skinny, tapered leg, which will only exaggerate width up top.

pockets

Discreet horizontal pockets are the most sleek; vertical or slanted pockets running along the side seams tend to stick out and thus exaggerate hips.

fabric

A medium-weight material, like tropical wool, adds structure without losing the shape of the body. Choose dark colors (black, charcoal, navy) to de-emphasize your lower half.

TRY: Raven Tailored Pants (shown), \$258.

TO BUY: www.bigdropnyc.com for locations.

OTHER GOOD BRANDS FOR YOUR BODY TYPE

- AK Anne Klein
- Ann Taylor
- Lafayette 148
- Laundry

what you'll see in stores

Many big retailers offer the same popular styles year after year. But how do you tell a pair of Jackson pants from a pair of Modern ones? Here's a quick guide to what you'll see on the racks and, more important, which body type each style flatters.

Jackson



BANANA REPUBLIC, \$98
BEST FOR: The contoured design is good for hourglass figures.
TO BUY: www.bananarepublic.com.

Julie Flair



ANN TAYLOR LOFT, \$59
BEST FOR: This slimming cut suits those with full hips and thighs.
TO BUY: www.annaylorloft.com.

Max C



THEORY, \$235
BEST FOR: The straight lines are ideal for women with boyish shapes.
TO BUY: www.theory.com for locations.

Curvy



LANE BRYANT, \$49.50
BEST FOR: Plus-size figures with wide hips should try this style.
TO BUY: www.lanebryant.com.

Modern



CHICO'S, \$88
BEST FOR: These are good for waists and hips that need a little extra room.
TO BUY: 888-855-4986.

Contour



WHITE HOUSE BLACK MARKET, \$98
BEST FOR: The waistband lays flat, which suits those with a tummy.
TO BUY: www.whitehouseblackmarket.com.

HOW TO... tailor your pants

A sampling of what your local tailor can do.

■ **LENGTH:** Pant legs can usually be let down 1½ inches. Ideally, hem pants up two inches maximum (the proportions will be off if more than that is taken up).

■ **RISE:** A tailor can take in or let out the rise as long as there is ¾ inch of fabric to work with.

■ **POCKETS:** Pockets that gape can be sewn shut or removed.

■ **WAIST:** A tailor can take in the waist up to 1½ inches at the back or along the side seams. If pants are snug, usually ½ inch of fabric can be let out.

■ **TAPERING:** Slightly narrowing the legs is possible, but you can't turn bell-bottoms into skinny pants without causing fit issues.



More pant Q. and A.'s

Learn more about flattering styles at www.realsimple.com/pants.