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# Maternity Wear



Texas Agricultural Extension Service

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# Maternity Wear

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**W**HILE WAITING for the birth of your child, you will want to have a well-planned maternity wardrobe and follow careful grooming practices. Lovely and fashionable ready-to-wear maternity clothes in flattering, comfortable styles and easy-care fabrics are available for today's mother-to-be. Or use your initiative and creativity to make your own maternity wear from the many commercial patterns available.

## Adapting to Changes

Several physical changes which occur during pregnancy significantly affect clothing choices. While you may wear many clothes from your current wardrobe for the first few months, special features in clothes eventually will be desirable.

As the abdomen increases in size, curvature of the lower spine increases to help maintain body balance. This posture change lengthens the front of your figure. For proper fit, garments should be wider through the waistline and abdomen and longer in front to keep a level hem length.

Increased breast size during pregnancy probably will require larger sizes in undergarments and in the bodice of clothes. Weight gain in the hips and upper thighs may necessitate additional garment width through these areas.

Skin changes during pregnancy may affect color and fabric selection in clothes and cosmetic choices. Many women who find their complexions best during pregnancy should let the beauty of the clear skin show through. Temporary skin coloring changes such as yellowing and the appearance of brown spots may be de-emphasized by a change in cosmetic type and color to provide even, attractive skin tones. Make-up base, rouge and lipstick in rosy shades, and bright rosy collars or scarfs near your face help reflect a healthy glow on your skin. Experiment with different colors at cosmetic counters to determine which is best for you.

During pregnancy skin may also become more oily and perspire more heavily than normal. To help counteract this, keep

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**Fig. 1. Many items from the present wardrobe can be worn for several months.**

skin clean. Since skin may feel uncomfortable because of stretching, wear soft, cool, absorbent fabrics.

### **Planning the Wardrobe**

Your present wardrobe will be adequate for the first few months. If you wear maternity clothes early in your pregnancy you may tire of them before the baby arrives. Give your figure a chance to develop before selecting maternity styles best for you.

Before you buy, make or borrow clothes, consider what you already have in your wardrobe and how many months you may be able to wear them. Depending on styles and current fashion trends, you can wear many blouses, shirts, jackets, dresses and pants for several months during your pregnancy, especially if they fit loosely around the waist, abdomen and hips. Try wearing blouses unbuttoned over other garments or under jumpers and dresses for a layered look. A long vest worn open can also be an asset to a maternity wardrobe. See figure 1.

These guidelines can help you decide which items in your present wardrobe can be worn during pregnancy, which items must be made or purchased, and which items might be borrowed:



Fig. 2. Separates make versatile maternity wear.

1. Plan purchases to coordinate with items in your present wardrobe. Depending on current styles, you can also wear many garments after pregnancy with little or no alteration. Reduce fullness with a belt or a few seams if needed.

Maternity wardrobes need not be large. Many wardrobe combinations can be achieved with only a few separates. See *figure 2*. Color-coordinate skirts, pants and shorts in solid colors with tops in prints, stripes, plaids, checks and geometrics. Or match and coordinate fabric designs in shirts and pants with solid-colored tops.

2. Plan clothes around expected activities. Consider wardrobe needs for daily activities and special occasions. For example, women who work outside the home or attend formal events may need larger wardrobes. Lounge dresses or caftans are great at-home styles that you can also wear after the baby arrives.

A cape or poncho may be a good choice for cold weather. A short or long coat should be designed with fullness across the abdomen.

3. Choose non-seasonal or transitional clothes by carefully selecting the color, fabric and style. Navy, red and white or

cream are good maternity-wear colors because they coordinate easily and tend to be non-seasonal.

A jumper is a good transitional item which can be worn alone or with a shirt, blouse or sweater for warmth as the weather gets colder. See figure 3.

4. Select clothes that are easy to care for and easy to get on and off. Buttoning a dress up the back may become a difficult task in the later months of pregnancy.

5. Choose comfortable shoes with good arch support. Since feet may tend to swell, shoe sizes and styles that allow for this will provide greater comfort. Avoid shoes which are difficult to walk in or which upset your body balance, such as very high heels.

6. Select your usual garment or pattern size unless you gain enough weight all over the figure to warrant a larger size. Adequate ease for waist and abdomen expansion is planned in maternity ready-to-wear and patterns. Choosing larger sizes causes improper fit in neck and shoulder areas where weight usually is not gained.

7. Include comfortable and attractive fabric in the maternity wardrobe. Today's stretch fabrics are ideal for "growing" with the body. Soft, light- to medium-weight fabrics are usually more comfortable for any season, especially if you select natural fibers or blends with natural fibers. Fabrics with good body create an attractive appearance. Avoid clingy or very sheer, unlined fabrics.

8. Select styles and colors becoming to you. Styles that allow the fabric to follow the natural curve of the figure are attractive. These may be tent-like, falling loosely from the shoulders, or semi-fitted in the bodice area falling loosely from the bust. See figure 4. Avoid styles which may not be practical for frequent or long-term wearing. Backless styles, for example, prevent wearing a bra.

While one-piece dresses are attractive and generally flattering, separates are more versatile. If you choose separates, see that the bodices are long enough to cover the abdomen.



Fig. 3. Jumpers may be non-seasonal or transitional wardrobe items.



Fig. 4. Attractive styles fall loosely from the shoulders or may be semi-fitted.

To de-emphasize the middle contour, focus attention upward with attractive necklines and yokes, colorful scarfs and jewelry or decorative trim near the face.

Vertical lines, small subtle prints and darker colors usually flatter the figure. Avoid tightly fitting clothes which create unattractive wrinkles.

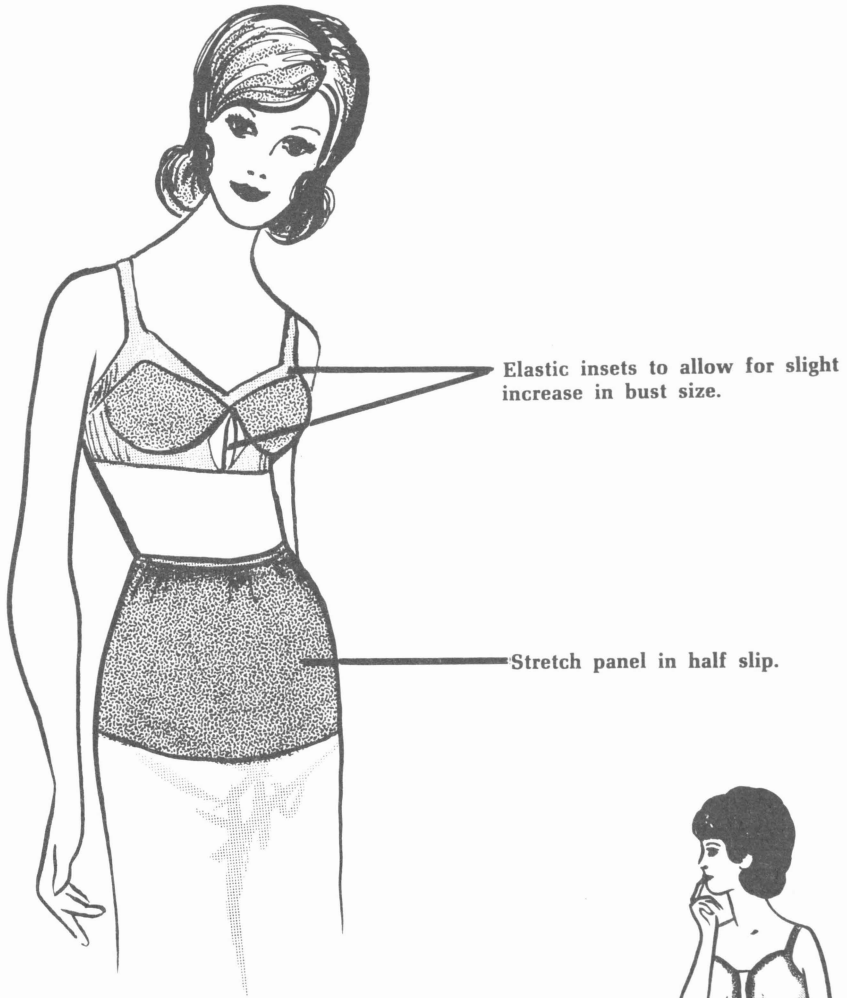
### Expandable Features

Clothing that allows for growth, particularly through the abdomen, is most functional. Look for the following expandable features in ready-to-wear and pattern styles, or add them to clothes you already have.

- Insert panel with two-way stretch can be purchased or made from scraps of stretch fabrics. Inexpensive panels may be made from discarded T-shirts dyed to match the garment fabric.
- Higher cuts on front waistlines of pants allow additional length over the abdomen.
- Multiple side seams can be stitched at  $\frac{1}{2}$ - to  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch intervals (1.3 cm to 1.5 cm) to let out as the pregnancy progresses. Instructions for other expandable techniques may be included in pattern guides.
- Pleats, tucks or gathers in dress or bodice fronts allow for expansion. Fullness may be controlled by a tab or tie which can be released slightly or removed completely for expansion.



Fig. 5. Tie-front in non-stretch fabrics with panel covering.



Elastic insets to allow for slight increase in bust size.

Stretch panel in half slip.

Fig. 6

Fullness through bust and abdomen of whole slip.

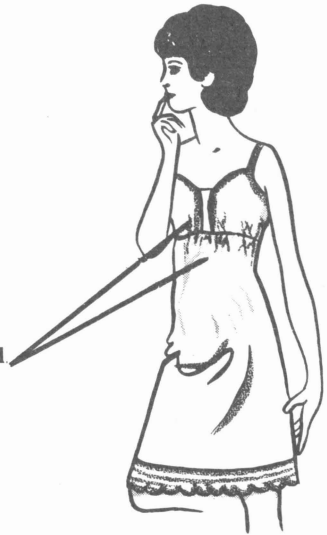


Fig. 7



- *Several tucks in elastic for casings can be stitched at ½- to 1-inch intervals (1.3 cm to 2.5 cm) across the end of the elastic and tacked near casing opening for easy removal. When additional width is needed, open casing, remove one or more rows of stitching in the elastic and restitch casing opening.*

- *Adjustable skirt hooks, or a series of buttons or snaps on waistband will allow only slight expansion.*

- *Tie-front opening in non-stretch fabrics may be covered with a panel which buttons or snaps to the waistband and adjusts as needed. See figure 5.*

## **The Undercover Story**

Comfortable, non-restricting undergarments that are soft, absorbent and easy to launder are ideal. Undergarments worn before pregnancy can be worn for the first few months. Choose bras with good support and control for greater comfort and to help prevent stretch marks. Avoid stretch straps which may not support adequately. Ask a salesperson for help in selecting a bra that fits properly.

Change bra sizes as often as necessary for comfort. While the greatest increase may be in the cup size, a larger bra size (circumference) also may be needed. Special maternity bras are available. They are cut higher under the arm to give greater control and may have expandable features for slight increases in cup size. See figure 6. Pads may be added to absorb breast secretions (colostrum) and to keep clothes from being spotted.

Leisure bras also are available for those who experience discomfort while sleeping without breast support.

Nursing bras are convenient for breast feeding. Purchase these just before the baby arrives. The cup should be large enough to accommodate increased breast size when lactation begins. Continue to wear maternity or nursing bras until breasts return to their normal size. A different bra size may be necessary after pregnancy because the size formerly worn may be too large or too small.

Choose slips that provide for necessary expansion. Stretch panels, elastic or extra gathers provide fullness through the bust and abdomen in whole slips. See figure 7. Half slips need adequate expansion through the waist and abdomen. See figure 6. Maternity slips are cut with extra fullness and length in front to allow for abdomen expansion and posture changes.

You may need to select panties in a larger size with non-constricting elastic, or maternity panties with front-stretch panels. Cotton panties are especially comfortable.

If you plan to continue wearing a girdle, be sure it is not too tight. Girdles are not intended to disguise or constrict the figure,

but to give support. If your doctor recommends a girdle for back support, obtain a maternity girdle with support panels under the stomach and special support across the upper back.

You may continue to wear your usual hosiery if you follow certain guidelines. If you prefer pantyhose, you may need a larger size than before. Be sure that waist elastic is not uncomfortably tight. Maternity pantyhose with inset stretch panels are available. See figure 8. If you wear regular hose, use a garter belt or girdle for support since round leg garters can cut off blood circulation and cause varicose veins.

Special maternity wear undergarments are available in maternity wear specialty shops, large department stores or through mail order catalogs.

### **Sleepwear**

You may continue wearing the same sleepwear if adequate fullness is allowed. Choose gowns or pajamas in soft absorbent fabrics with fullness through the abdomen. For breast feeding, choose sleepwear with front openings or stretchable neck elastic which may be pulled down for nursing. Attractive sleepwear is available in many styles and weights from frilly sheers to heavier flannels.

### **Clothing for You—Plus One!**

Selecting and wearing attractive maternity wear can help you feel better because you know you look your best. Today's maternity clothes and lingerie follow the same fashion trends as regular womenswear, but allow the necessary fullness for figure changes. Plan your wardrobe carefully and you will look lovely for any occasion.



**Fig. 8. Maternity pantyhose with stretch panel.**

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*Educational programs conducted by the Texas Agricultural Extension Service serve people of all ages regardless of socio-economic levels, race, color, sex, religion or national origin.*

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