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S M T W T F S

A perfect fit

Follow a few guidelines, and you'll avoid buying those regrettable fashion finds

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Too-high pants, too-short tops and supertight jackets.

These wardrobe malfunctions are brought to you by Americans, both men and women, who deny their true clothing sizes. They're the folks who walk out of stores without trying on shirts or say "good 'nuf" to any pair of pants.

Sure, we're in an anarchistic age of style. Jeans come in baggy and tight, and track suits and football jerseys hang in closets of nonathletes. But there are guidelines for fit that can make these fabrics hang well on all body types. Check out the right details in the dressing room, and a proper fit can be achieved, say stylists.

"You specialize on you and start figuring out what works for you," says Tracy McWilliams, author of "Dress to Express."

Jeans and pants

Women: "I like to see jeans that are figure-flattering on a girl's body," says Paige Adams-Geller, a former fit model and Los Angeles-based designer of Paige Premium Denim.

For curvy women, she recommends jeans that flare at the end of the legs to even out their figures. Short women can appear taller with pants that have creases down the middle fronts.

Fashionistas who wear heels with pants should let the ends skim the ground just enough not to trip, designers say.

And, please, no plumber butt. Adams-Geller recommends the sit-down test. If pants gape in the back, they don't fit, or a belt is needed. Jeans that are higher in the back than the front also help alleviate this faux pas.

This summer's hybrid of shorts and pants, Bermuda



Pants skim the ground and are flared. (Illustrations by Kim Kagarise / Argus Leader)

PANT PEEVES

"Carrot legs are just so unflattering, no matter what you wear," says Paige Adams-Geller, a former fit model and Los Angeles-based designer of Paige Premium Denim. She's talking about pants with supertapered ankles. And that's not the only denim mistake she sees - there are those high-waisted jeans that are cinched in.

"That reminds me a little bit of the '80s," she says. For those who don't want to wear low-riders (aka pants that reveal hip bones, etc.), Adams-Geller says pants waists should fall a half-inch

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and mother,
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For the rest of us, designers advise selecting a less tailored version of the Bermuda short.

Men: "It's a delicate dance when it comes to pants," says Amy Gallagher, a style expert at Framingham, Mass.-based Marshalls.

"With pants, you don't want to go too snug," she says, adding that men should be able to place two fingers between them and their waistbands.

When standing, the hems of pants should at least reach the tops of shoes, she says. When sitting, sock tops shouldn't be visible.

Shirts

Women: For shirts, stand up straight in the dressing room, Matsumoto says. Tops should be square on shoulders, and those shoulders should be able to wriggle around without being confined.

Sleeveless shirts should be worn with strapless or racer-back bras that can't be seen under the shirt, she says.

Men: Collared shirts also should pass the finger test at the neck, Gallagher says. Collars that are too loose, however, will bunch under a tie.

She advises men to place their arms straightforward, zombie-style, to ensure ends of the cuffs don't creep any higher than men's watch straps. The same goes for suit jackets. Be able to reach forward without getting constricted in the shoulders.

Skirts

Designers are predicting the long, early-'90s peasant skirts will be back in the fall.

For hot summer days in the office, though, Matsumoto says A-line cuts are a woman's friend because they minimize her hips. Skirts just above the knee flatter most figures.

Reach reporter Monica LaBelle at 977-3909.

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