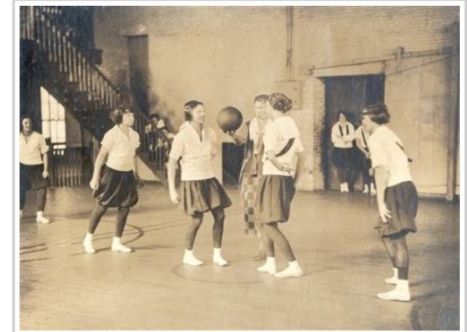


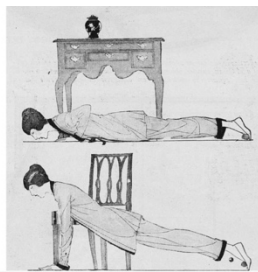
Women, Exercise and Workout Clothes

By Patricia Menz, Sacramento Capitol A's, Sacramento, CA

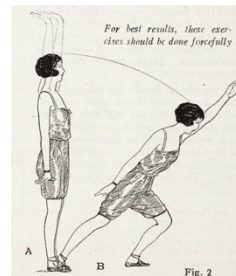
The perception of exercise for women changed dramatically during the 1920s. At the turn of the century the common thought was that a woman's body was not suited to strenuous exercise. Suggested activities included horseback riding (where the horse does all the work), walking, dancing, calisthenics, badminton, tennis and bicycling. Basketball was also played using modified rules. Although we still do these things today, early 20th century women were cautioned not to overdo strenuous activities that could cause physical strain or damage to their reproductive organs.



Girls Playing Basketball

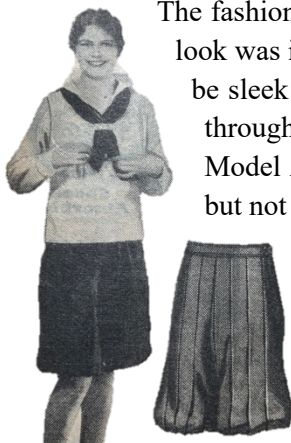


Pushups in pajamas, Good Housekeeping, 1920



Lunges in lingerie, Good Housekeeping, 1923

In 1900 one woman participated in the Olympics in a sailing competition. By 1924 more women were competing in other events, which caused many to re-evaluate the benefits of more strenuous activity.



The fashion styles of the era changed as well. The corseted figure was out and the long, sleek look was in. If a woman wanted to take advantage of corset-less fashions, her body needed to be sleek as well. Other than wearing a girdle, the only way to achieve a slender body was through exercise. The clothes worn for exercise evolved during the 1920s and 1930s. The Model A era is right in the middle of this transition. Acceptable clothing changed slowly, but not completely until the mid 1930s. The most common exercise attire for both girls and women were bloomers, a middy (sailor) blouse in long or short sleeves and black leggings. At the time there was no alternative clothing for more strenuous activity. However, women became more creative using what was available.

Some wore lingerie.



Some wore loose fitting pajamas.



Others wore bathing suits.



As the pre-runner to the leotard, the swimsuit was well suited to exercise. It had tank top shoulders, a skirted bottom with shorts underneath and was made of a knit fabric which moved with the body. Swimsuits were also made to get wet, so perspiration was not a problem.

Catalogs like Sears and Montgomery Ward were selling girl's and young women's gym suits as an alternative to bloomers and middie blouses. The gym suits were sleeveless, belted, one piece garments with elastic at the bottom of the pant legs. The 1932 Sears Roebuck catalog sold them in sizes 8 -22 years. Size 22 years would fit a person with a bust of 40 inches. Likely many older, more mature women could fit into these as well. However, it wasn't until the early-to-mid 1930's that society as a whole accepted this new athletic wear as proper attire.



By 1934, bloomers and middie tops were mostly phased out. Change is a long and difficult process. There may have been a feeling that these clothes were for younger people and reminded many women of school gym classes from their past. The personal views of exercise for women needed to change first, they needed to *want* to embark on this new endeavor, and it is only then that the acceptance of new exercise clothing styles could follow behind it.



Sears Roebuck
Catalog, 1939

Gym wear continued to evolve as new fabrics and technologies became available. What we wear today is a far cry from what was worn 100 years ago.



Mid 1930's gym wear

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