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Undershirts essential for crisp, fresh look

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THE GUYS AT work make fun of me because I do not wear an undershirt. Can you help me understand why I should?

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Undershirts are an essential part of your wardrobe for several reasons, especially in the summer. First, undershirts help hide underarm perspiration stains. The last thing you want as your image "signature" is an unsightly stain on your shirt, which can be perceived as sloppy personal hygiene and low confidence. If you like old movies like I do, you can appreciate Cary Grant's classic and elegant-style dress. I never saw him sweat.

Interestingly, the history of the undershirt is a bit cloudy in that there seems to be no consensus as to the origination. Some thoughts are:

Undershirts were developed in the late 1800s in England.

Undershirts came to the U.S. during World War I when soldiers witnessed European soldiers wearing undershirts as uniforms instead of wool uniforms.

In 1913, the U.S. Navy brought undershirts to the U.S. when the sailors wore shirts to conceal their chest hair.

In 1932, the underwear company Jockey was asked to developed "sweat absorbing" shirts for the USC Trojans football team.

Whatever the history, wearing undershirts provides for a clean, crisp look with dress shirts. Undershirts are especially important when wearing finer men's dress shirts made from Sea Island, Egyptian or Pima cotton. These shirts are thinner and smooth to the touch and can be much more revealing. An undershirt will hide chest hair when wearing these dress shirts while also serving to extend the life of the shirt. If you wear broadcloth cotton button-downs, which by nature are more coarse, an undershirt can be more comfortable.

It is important to choose a style of undershirt that fits properly. Undershirts that are too large will have a tendency to bunch up around the middle and the sleeves, which will make the wearer appear heavier. Conversely, wearing an undershirt that is too small will be uncomfortable and have the tendency to come untucked from the trousers, which can be highly irritating.

Mikel Schwarz, founder of ribbedtee.com undershirts, has created a new undershirt that has "crossed the form-fitting and cool-comfort benefits of the ribbed tank top with the underarm and perspiration protection of the traditional undershirt." Schwarz says his vision was to provide affordability, fit, feel and function to undershirts. Many T-shirt styles address one or two of these issues but not all four.

Ultimately, it is up to the individual wearer to decide. My recommendation to men is wear an undershirt for the simple reason that it looks more pulled together.

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Jill Haney, founder of JH Image Consulting, is a certified image consultant. Reach her at 513-505-2732, jill@jhimage.net or www.jhimage.net.

In your voice

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ZipSalty wrote:

I respectfully disagree with Ms. Haney. In today's mixed-gender offices, showing a little chest hair can be a shortcut to a raise or even a promotion. It may not be politically correct but I'm not a "consultant." I've got a real job. And, by the way, I don't have to tell my boss I'm working hard, my underarm sweat stains send the message loud and clear.

7/15/2008 10:00:28 AM

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wcroB wrote:

Why is it I always find this particular columnist commenting about what MEN should wear. Perhaps I could point out some things that WOMEN should do...? Would that be appropriate for a guy to do?

7/13/2008 3:47:14 PM

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