



The front-closing Arthritis Bra uses a large loop and Velcro in its front closure.

Easy bra helps women cope

A new type of bra is now available for women with limited hand movement or upper-body dexterity.

Arthritis Bras, which close in the front, are made by Leading Lady, the Beachwood-based manufacturer of intimate apparel. Cleveland is the first market where they have been introduced.

The bras have won praise from the Arthritis Foundation for their ease of use. They are made especially for women for whom conditions such as arthritis, multiple sclerosis or a torn rotator cuff would make putting on the typical rear-closing bra difficult.

"We have national commitments from many catalog houses, including J.C. Penney, to carry these bras for sale in early 2001," said Mark Corrado, president of Leading Lady. "But we wanted to give the Cleveland-area women the first opportunity to purchase them since they were involved in the design through focus groups."

The focus groups were conducted in Beachwood with the help of the Northeast Ohio Chapter of the Arthritis Foundation.

Founded in 1939 in Cleveland, Leading Lady is an industry leader in maternity and nursing intimate apparel in the country. In the last decade, the company has expanded into full-figure, post-mastectomy and other intimate apparel markets.

Two years ago, the company embarked on the Arthritis Bra project, working with a Canadian inventor, Francine Lonn.

Leading Lady used Lonn's first patented closure in a sleep/leisure version of a Leading Lady bra. Later, the two companies teamed up to incorporate improvements suggested by Cleveland focus-group participants that further satisfied limited-dexterity requirements.

The result was an even more simplified, patent-pending loop closure with Velcro and large "trouser-style" hooks (instead of tiny clasps) used on Leading Lady's custom bra styles.

"We never truly realized the importance of our own product in helping women cope with the frustrations of limited dexterity until we started conducting the focus groups," Corrado says. "Sure, we realized there was a need out there, but when actually talking with these women who struggle to fasten and unfasten tiny hooks and buttons associated with everyday dressing, we then became passionate about finding a solution."

"Some women actually need assistance from a loved one to help them dress. We are hoping the Arthritis Bras can restore independence and dignity in situations like that."

Susan Loessin, president of the Northeastern Ohio Chapter of the Arthritis Foundation, says she was pleased that the results of the focus groups were key in the design of the bras. "It was nice to see this idea come to fruition," she says.

The bras sell for between \$19 and \$35, depending on the style.

The following seven Medic stores now carry the Arthritis Bras in their home health-care departments: 17400 Lorain Ave., Cleveland; 19001 Euclid Ave., Euclid; 18200 Sloane Ave., Lakewood; 5510 Ridge Rd., Parma; 34362 Aurora Rd., Solon; 7320 Lake Shore Blvd., Mentor; and 30450 Lake Shore Blvd., Willowick.

Solomon's Corset Shop in the Pavilion Mall, 24067 Chagrin Blvd., Beachwood, also carries the bras.

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