

How To Buy Maternity Clothes

By Brian Hammond

Maternity wear has come a long way from the flowered tents of yesteryear. Whereas once even the word “pregnant” was taboo in the media and polite society, now the watchword is basically if you’ve got a baby on board, flaunt it. And though this can be taken a bit too far, creating a new life is definitely not something which needs to be hidden away under yards of fabric.

Fortunately, nobody knows that better than the department and specialty stores that are selling maternity wear these days. Though you will still find some downright ugly dresses, for the most part the emphasis is on comfort, convenience and stylishness. One thing you should remember as you shop for maternity wear however is to accept your changing body and dress accordingly. You are not “fat,” with all of the negative connotations our society and ourselves place on that word. You’re pregnant, and you naturally have to accommodate the fashion needs of that second person you’re carrying around inside you. Trying to squeeze into too small or otherwise restrictive clothing will be a battle that you can’t win, so why even try. Enjoy your pregnancy as much as possible along with the changes your body is going through, and use it as an opportunity to develop healthier eating habits, if necessary, as well as getting regular exercise.

In addition to specific maternity wear, such as “empire” style dresses (which are fortunately becoming fashionable again) for special occasions, you can also find business and professional wear. Maternity pants with elastic panels in front to accommodate a growing baby, longer coats and tunics which lengthen the body, t-shirts, shells, elastic waist skirts and stretch fabrics that are already popular and stylish can all help you look neat and accommodate a pregnancy. Unless you have a specific reason for not doing so, informing your coworkers is always a good idea, not only for advice and tips they may have but also because, frankly, you may need a break now and then in terms of dressing a bit more casually if necessary. Remember, when it comes down to it, it’s also about how you feel, because your perception of how you look may be skewed by the dramatic changes you’re going through.

For non-professional situations, leggings and big shirts (raid your husband’s closet) can provide easy outfits for shopping or just around the house. And if you attend a lot of formal occasions, consider supplementing your wardrobe with outfits that may have only been worn once or twice available at your local thrift store or women’s exchange. You may find you want to put some of your own maternity outfits there as well once the baby arrives.

With maternity wear, which can be a little bland or monochromatic, accessorizing is even more important. Give yourself a maternity makeover, with a new easy care haircut and color. Shop for diaper bags as well as totes and bigger handbags to accommodate all the things you'll need to carry. Don't forget shoes and underwear, even if you're a dedicated thong and Jimmy Choo kind of person, you're going to need some sensible underwear and some stylish, but flat soled shoes once your pregnancy progresses and for some time after the baby is born as well. And have your partner keep up a steady flow of jewelry, watches, hair-wear and the like, there's nothing like a little gift of fashion to lift your spirits as well as enliven wool leggings and a cashmere sweater.

Finally, don't forget basic black (and other neutrals and basics from navy to cocoa to winter and summer whites.) Whether you're dressing for work, for a formal occasion or just knocking around, an elastic skirt, a pair of elastic waist pants, short or long sleeved shell and a long deconstructed blazer, coat or tunic can form the backbone of a stylish and not overly expensive maternity wardrobe which you can then supplement with more fun pieces, items borrowed from friends and relatives or thrift shop finds. Just remember to buy yourself one outfit (and American designers like Donna Karan are moms' best friend) that makes you feel as fabulous as you are.

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