

The History of Underpants

Throughout history, underwear has come and gone. For millions of years, people didn't wear underwear at all! The first kind of underwear was called a **loincloth**, which was just a really tiny skirt that covered only what needed to be covered. Mummies that date as far back as 7,000 years have been found with traces of loincloths on them!

By the 13th century, people began wearing pull-on underpants, closer to what we wear today. Called **braies**, they were baggy pants that fell just above the knee. However, not all men wore braies. In the 1300s and 1400s, some men wore shorter skirts than women! King Edward IV issued a proclamation declaring that skirts be long enough to cover men's bottoms. Instead of lengthening their skirts, men began wearing brief-like pants under their tunics to cover up.

In the late 1700s and early 1800s, industrialism made cotton fabrics cheaper and more easily available. **Long johns** became the standard undergarment for men. Some men wore their long johns all winter, only washing it at the beginning of the spring.

In the 1800s, women had it rough when it came to undergarments. In most western cultures, women wore many layers of underwear. Most of it was bulky and uncomfortable, but women often felt forced to wear it—if they didn't, they would be ridiculed. The intention of most women's underwear at the time was to change the wearer's appearance: **bustles** and **hoop skirts** to make dresses fashionable, **corsets** to make the waist appear smaller, and long **hose** to cover the legs. Sometimes, staying in style came at the expense of a woman's health—women often fainted from having their corsets squeezed so tight.

In the mid-1800s, a woman named Amelia Bloomer said goodbye to the silly underwear society told her she should wear. She began wearing only loose-fitting pants under her dresses. **Bloomers** eliminated the need for hoop skirts and corsets, and the trend caught on. Though she didn't invent them, they were called bloomers after the woman who popularized them. Not only were they more comfortable, but they made a statement: that women could wear whatever they wanted, not what society told them they should wear!

During World War I, soldiers were issued shorts to wear as underwear under their uniforms. Once the war was over, men continued to wear them, and they became the **boxer shorts** we see today. Briefs became popular in the 1930s.

Now, we wear underwear in every shape, color and style, but who knows...maybe in the next 50 years, underwear will fall out of fashion again!

Underwear Match

Match the type of underwear to the picture.



Boxers



Bloomers



Braies

Briefs

