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Style and the Short Woman



Photo: Michael Edwards

Flattering style strategies for those 5'4" and under

Those bony giantesses who stalk the runways rarely resemble body types personally known to most of us—but for smaller women, the gap is especially acute. Perhaps that's why they call it high fashion.

Fantasy, not inclusivity, rules the clothing business; for decades, women who carried extra weight (including the pregnant) were invisible to top designers. But while the "curvy" market (previously regarded as heavy) is gaining recognition, enough attention isn't being paid to the 5'4" and under crowd—especially those size 16 and up. "There's so much education to be done, it's incredible," says Kim Williams Dahlman, author of *The Petite Handbook*, a fashion bible for smaller women.

Still, when you're the smallest kid in your class, you learn to be a survivor, and shorter women, against all odds, find ways to be stylish: They not only buy petite versions of well-known labels but seek out slim-cut regular brands; they even find treasures in kids' departments. Tailors, not diamonds, are their best friends—which is why their wardrobes usually fit better than those of their too-lazy-for-alterations "average"-size sisters. And they think surprisingly big and bold, refusing to let height limit or define their style. Says Gwen Marder, fashion director for the Fox News Channel and one of our models here, "Inside, I've always been a tall blonde."