

BRAND PROFILE: UPCOUTURE

A Paris-based apparel start-up has used carefully cut and strategically positioned strips of elastic film to turn T-shirts into garments that can help wearers maintain “a dream posture”.

Posture-enhancing T-shirts from Paris

A posture-enhancing T-shirt from Paris-based clothing start-up UpCouture has begun to make an impression internationally. UpCouture formally launched its Up T-Shirt in the US at the start of 2015 and is now available for delivery to online shoppers in most markets around the world.

Made from 92% organic cotton and 8% elastane, the shirt aids good posture, the clothing company claims, thanks to what it calls “an extra-thin configuration of elastic

strips” that are sewn and bonded into the garment in strategic places, allowing wearers to feel a difference if they adopt a poor posture. In simple terms, the garment is more comfortable on the back, shoulders and torso if the wearer sits or stands up straight. It doesn’t force people to move or hold themselves in a particular way, but just applies a little gentle pressure to encourage wearers to adjust their position until it feels right. The company insists this “elastic resistance” will last for the lifetime of the shirt.

The Up T-Shirt comes in several styles, and is aimed at women and men, but what makes it special is the technical textile strips that promote “a dream posture”.

 UpCouture



Unattractive slouching

Lawyer Neda Naef founded UpCouture because she was concerned that slouching over her computer for long periods of her working day might make her look unattractive. A fitness fanatic and in good shape, she realised that the problem of poor posture could affect unfit people even more severely. "The Up T-Shirt is a completely new concept," she says, "and it will allow the wearer to have a dream posture."

Ms Naef's information is that around 80% of people fail to hold their shoulders in the best way and she says quickly that one of her main concerns about this is the way in which it detracts from our aesthetic appeal. "The aim we had was to come up with something that would help, but something that's pleasant to wear and that you can keep on all day long," she explains. She took her time researching the technology and construction methods that would work best for what she wanted to do. Inspired by her parents, both of whom are doctors, she began studying the physiological processes that promote optimal posture and examining previous attempts to produce devices to train the body to adopt the correct position. She found most of them to provoke too much discomfort and even some that compressed the torso in a way she disliked. "The technology had to be right and it had to feel soft inside the garment," she explains. "And I found it, but the next challenge I had was in using the technology for a fashion project rather than something in the sports or medical fields."

Special strips in special places

With the right partners in the hub of technical textile excellence that exists on her doorstep in the Nord-Pas de Calais region in the north of France, she has been able to apply for patents for the process. Rolls of the elastic film are bonded onto fabric and then laser cut into strips for insertion into exactly the right places in each Up T-Shirt, with five strips going into each garment across the upper back, at the collar bone to support the trapezius muscle and across the upper arm, just below each shoulder. These strips are inserted between layers of organic cotton so that only the cotton comes into contact with the wearer's skin.

Gentle pressure

If the wearer's shoulders leave their correct alignment, she or he will feel that slight touch of gentle pressure. Rather than impart any discomfort or pain, UpCouture's insistence is that the wearer will feel resistance behind the shoulder and in the upper back as "a reminder" to straighten up. It says the construction of the T-shirt will use the movement of our own arms to "remind" us to stand up straight. The company



says the goal of the T-shirt is not to support the back too firmly so as not to weaken the muscles there. Designer Olivier Battino, who worked with Ms Naef on the project, says he believed in the idea from the outset, viewing it as "a good challenge". He says the Up T-Shirt is a product "with real strength", simple in style and shape so that it can be worn as part of practically any outfit.

Organic cotton as the main material, a high level of technical textile expertise in the special posture-promoting strips and a commitment to making the garments in France make the Up T-Shirt an expensive, high-end product.

 UpCouture

Close to home

Around 30 prototypes formed part of an extensive testing programme that UpCouture undertook before launching its T-shirt. It was only after completing these tests that the company decided on using an extra-thin film that can be sewn and bonded into the garment while still retaining 100% recovery power, in spite, Ms Naef says, of the fact that this made the elastic strips around five times more expensive than they might have been. It seems to mean a great deal to Ms Naef for the Up T-Shirt to be a product that is made in France, which makes it even more expensive. These two factors, plus her insistence on using organic cotton, go some way towards explaining the price-tag of an Up T-Shirt, which is €127 for the least expensive. The company thought about taking manufacturing overseas, but opted to make the T-shirts, not just in France but in the capital, for reasons of proximity.

When companies mention proximity in this context, they are often referring to being close to where their consumers are, but for Ms Naef the most important thing is for production to be close enough to her and her team to allow them to have the control they feel they need to have over the manufacturing process. She counts five steps in the manufacturing process and wants to carry out checks on each garment after each step, so the T-shirts are produced in Paris as this is where she lives. She is, however, enthusiastic about selling them and shipping them to men and women all over the world. 🌐