

# SIMPLE STYLE

## LEGGINGS

Words: **CLARE GOGERTY**

Once worn exclusively for exercise, it is now perfectly OK to wear leggings the entire time. Excellent news for this the most comfortable item of clothing known to woman. Technical fabrics and all manner of clever body-fitting styling mean leggings are even more comfortable than pyjamas, and, unlike pyjamas, you can wear them outdoors without looking like a slacker. It also means that if you suddenly fancy a bit of yoga in the living room, or throwing shapes in the kitchen, you are ready to go.

All leggings, however, are not the same. Cheap versions are merely tights with the feet cut off: thin, with a tendency to sag and no reassuring snugness. Stump up for a pricier version and you will be rewarded with a secure high waist, seams that don't chafe and maybe even pockets in which to stash a phone or a credit card.

Modern leggings originated in 1958 following the game-changing invention of Lycra, aka Spandex, by American textile chemist Joseph Shivers. It became the material of choice for sportswear, enabling fabric to stretch up to five times its length, dry quickly and spring back into shape.

The popularity of aerobics classes in the 1980s boosted their popularity as the



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nation, egged on by The Green Goddess, Jane Fonda et al, adopted the fetching combo of leggings, legwarmers and big hair. Debbie Harry wore a pair with an oversized T-shirt, and Madonna, in her *Desperately Seeking Susan* phase, wore a pair as part of a layered ensemble of miniskirts, midribs and many bangles.

Leggings fell out of favour in the 90s but came back with a vengeance in the 2000s as the athleisure trend grew. Increasing numbers of celebrities were seen out and about in a pair, post yoga or the gym.

Leggings made of synthetic material like Lycra, however, are non-recyclable and, when washed, release microfibres into drains and, subsequently, the ocean. Fortunately, forward-looking brands are creating alternatives: Asquith's leggings are made from 90% organic cotton and bamboo and 10% Elastane; BAM from bamboo; Howies from organic fabrics.

Alternatively, you could avoid fabric altogether and go for a leather pair, as worn by Michelle Obama. Unlike leather trousers with their whiffy, rock chick associations, leather leggings are elegant, flexible and comfortable enough to wear curled up in a favourite armchair with a book which, really, is largely their point. **S**

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