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In years to come, the early 21st century will be looked back on as a time of strong and enduring fashion statements. First, there were skinny jeans, a trend which has stuck around for close to a decade. Then there were maxi dresses, which were first thought to be a one-summer style but have really captured the imagination of women across the UK. And now, there's the peplum – but what exactly is a peplum?

Essentially, a peplum is a frill that's built into a piece of clothing. It's designed to sit around the waist and come down to the hips. It's a style that originates in the 1940s and has largely been seen as the surprise high street hit of 2012. Peplum has a reputation for being hard to wear, or better suited to women of tall and thin physique. In truth, women of any shape or size can be flattered by peplum, if they know how to do it right.

The most common way to wear peplum is built into a top: either a fitted blouse or a loose sleeveless vest. Both can be dressed up or down, depending on the look you're going for. For a stylish office outfit, pair a peplum blouse with a pencil skirt and high heels, and wear with a relaxed blazer. There's no need to stick to block colours either. A checked, striped or animal print peplum top has the potential to look great. Alternatively, wear a peplum blouse with tailored trousers and wedges for a slightly more laid back vibe. If you're petite, this is a particularly good choice as it'll make your legs look longer.

If you're more of an all-in-one kind of girl, peplums are still an option. Many high street stores are stocking peplum dresses, a style that was seen on the Oscars red carpet this year too. Peplum dresses are particularly versatile: for instance, if you're looking for a wedding dress that's a bit different but bang on trend, go for a strapless, off-white peplum maxi dress. Or for a cocktail party, choose a knee-length peplum dress whose top and bottom halves are different colours: so it looks like you're wearing a skirt and top.

Many people are scared of peplum, and understandably so. It's a strong look and, in these economically depressed times, people lean towards buying new clothing that they think will last more than one or two seasons. But rest assured, peplum shows every sign of hanging around for a while yet. To get started, choose simple black dresses with peplum to see how comfortable you feel with the style. A peplum jacket is also a great entry point, before graduating to more lavish blouses and peplum prints.

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