



Style Feature

## Best Denim For The Office

Hitha Prabhakar 05.23.07, 12:01 AM ET

It's hard enough trying to figure out how to adhere to your company's "business casual" rules without throwing denim into the mix.

But that's exactly what's happening in offices from coast to coast.

"If I could wear my jeans to work every day I would, but with our policies some jeans are acceptable only on certain days," says a manager at McKinsey and Company, who asked not to be named. "Prior to three-day weekends we receive an announcement saying we can wear jeans [on that Friday], which usually means it's fair game for any type of denim. People for the most part use their discretion and wear something that's work-appropriate."

### In Pictures: Best Denim For The Office

Other workplaces have a more clear-cut and stringent denim policy.

At Goldman Sachs, denim simply is forbidden, says Marc Kandel, a spokesman for the company. By contrast, at Google or at Digitas, an advertising company based in Boston and New York, you can wear jeans anytime you want.

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"We are a creative agency, so we are not restricted by dress codes," says Patti Walsh, manager of recruiting at Digitas. "If [the jeans] fit right and look appropriate, meaning no rips, etc., they are acceptable."

A study of 200 men and another of 500 women conducted earlier this year by *Cotton Incorporated Lifestyle Monitor* magazine found that just over 65% of women surveyed prefer wearing denim jeans to work and wore them in the office at least four days a week. Seventy-four percent of men surveyed prefer to wear jeans at work, rather than other types of pants. This yen for denim has prompted employers to write explicit denim clauses into their human resource handbooks, according to Mary R. Crane, founder of Mary Crane Associates, a business consulting company based in Denver. These clarify where and when denim is permissible (or not).

### Jonesing For Jeans

While denim originally had blue-collar roots (gold miners in California were among the first wearers of Levis) the fabric long ago lost its association with any particular class.

Americans last year spent more than \$1,505,200,600 on jeans, according to NPD Group, a retail research company. Sales of jeans costing \$100 or more per pair increased 51% for men and 53% for women (based on 2005 figures, the most recent available).

But one office's jeans is not another's. And before you go and invest \$100 in a premium pair, it's wise to figure out what kind works best for your own office environment.

### Decoding Denim

Most jeans suitable for office wear have four traits in common: They aren't ripped or disheveled in appearance, they have a uniform color (dark, usually), they are made of a thicker grade of denim (called "selvedge") and they fit properly (not too tight or too baggy).

Men working in a relatively informal corporate environment, for example at a dot-com or an advertising agency, can get away with wearing a more casual, slightly baggier jean like the [Five Pocket Classic Spurr](#), which fits close to the body but not so close that people can count the keys in your pocket. These jeans come in black and are slightly boot-cut, which could be a little edgy for a corporate environment. Other good choices for a slim fit include the slightly boot-cut [Even Steven Jean](#) by Nudie, straight leg jeans like the [Banana Republic Straight Dark-Wash Premium](#) or the [Earnest Sewn Ace Straight Leg](#).

If your office requires suits and ties during the work week, most likely your "casual" days require you to be slightly dressed up. The [Rag & Bone Selvedge Slim Leg Jean](#) should be appropriate, since it fits more like a trouser and can be worn with a dress shirt or blazer. The [Dsquared2 Maple Leaf Jean](#) and the [Dolce and Gabbana Creased Jean](#) also can be dressed up--but a word of caution: Stick to solid colors and clean lines when accessorizing these pants. Busy patterns like plaid or houndstooth can make them look too casual.

### Ladies' Lines

Women face a somewhat different denim dilemma. This season's low-slung "skinny jeans" put wearers at risk of being thought too risqué. Give these jeans a pass.

Instead, to prevent offending supervisors and to avoid run-ins with human resources, opt for wider-legged, higher-waisted trouser pants, such as [Anlo Shon Poe Trousers](#) in dark denim or [Paige Premium Denim Robertson Jeans](#). Both can be combined with a tank top, for a casual look, or a more formal blouse and blazer.

While men have a hard time getting away with colored jeans, women can safely wear them. Example: The [7 For All Mankind Jackie Pant](#) in clean white, a trouser style with a high waist, which can be worn with a solid-colored shirt or blazer. Do tread lightly when you decide to wear colored jeans: Bright colors that are too tight will almost always look unprofessional in any office setting.

With any trend, there's bound to be a backlash. Will the day come when "casual Fridays" disappear and when even the most costly and conservative jeans get banished from the office?

Probably not. But that doesn't mean you can play fast and loose with your appearance.

"Anything dirty, ripped, too tight or ill-fitting will not work in any office," says Crane. "Even in the most casual environments you don't want to look like you just rolled out of bed and threw on whatever you could find. What you wear will make a lasting impression, so you always want to make sure you look your best."

**[In Pictures: Best Denim For The Office](#)**