

how to sew with

KNIT FABRICS

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HOW TO SEW WITH KNIT FABRICS tells you how to work with knitted fabrics (you'll learn that many techniques are different from the ones you use on woven fabrics). It tells you how to treat the fabric before you put the pattern on it, how to cut it and how to sew with it.

HOW TO SEW WITH KNIT FABRICS tells you how to use your sewing machine, how to vary necklines on a basic pattern and how to select and care for knits.

HOW TO SEW WITH KNIT FABRICS will help you sew successfully with knits.

PREPARATION

Pre-treat the fabric as you intend to care for it later (this includes dry cleaning as well as washing and drying). Some fabrics, such as cotton, shrink considerably and should be processed twice. Measure after first and second treatments to check for progressive shrinkage (shrinks after each washing and drying). If fabric does shrink each time, plan to drip dry or dry flat instead of using dryer.

PATTERN LAYOUT

Fold lines: See if they can be pressed out. If they can't, use fold line for pattern pieces where there is a natural fold, such as a sleeve center. Place all other pieces where they will not fall on this permanent fold.

Lengthwise ribs: When you buy knit fabric, it may be in tubular form, flat or have cut edges that have been sewn together. In a knit that is flat or that has been sewn together, the cut edge may not follow the rib.

To lay out on double thickness, fold fabric so that it will hang straight, being sure there are no wrinkles or "drag" lines when it is flat. Use your eye to judge (I call this "eyeballing" the fabric). The same principle applies to fabric in tubular form that is to be cut double thickness.

Place pattern pieces parallel to the folded edge, rather than lining them up along ribs (especially in cotton single knits). This will keep side seams from twisting and the garment will hang straight.

You may line up pattern pieces parallel to ribs in double knits, where ribs tend to run more true.

Stripes: If fabric is in tubular form, split it so you can cut through single thickness. Line up pattern pieces along stripes, matching stripes at armseye points on body and sleeve.

When you need identical pattern pieces, cut one, then use it as the pattern to match stripes for the second piece. In some cases it is not possible to match side seams in order to have a single stripe running horizontally across the bottom.

All knits: Be sure fabric is relaxed, has no wrinkles and does not hang over edge of cutting surface. In placing pattern, use as few pins as possible or hold down with weights. Use extra pins or weights to control edges that roll or press edges after a light application of spray starch.

For firm knits with little stretch, you may need to use a pattern a size larger than usual; for loose or extra-stretchy knits, you may need a size smaller for proper fit.

NOTIONS

Thread: You may use mercerized cotton thread on cotton knits. Polyester and polyester-cotton blends have more strength and stretch than cotton and are suitable for most knits.

Interfacings: Usually unnecessary except under buttons and buttonholes or where design details call for extra stiffness or body.

Linings and underlinings: Usually unnecessary, as they defeat the comfort and drapeability of the knit. If you want a lining for color or opacity, use a lightweight knit that also has "give". If you want to use a woven lining, make it separately as a slip.

MACHINE SEWING

Needles: Use a sharp regular needle or ballpoint needle: size 9 or 11 for lingerie and sheer fabrics, size 11 for lightweight knits, size 14 for heavier knits and size 16 or 18 for power stretch knits.

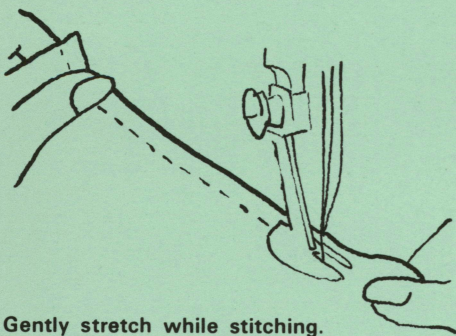
Adjustments: Use balanced tension, light pressure, stitch length of 8 to 10 stitches per inch.

Stitching: For straight stitching, you may use a regular presser foot and single-hole throat plate — hold the threads taut for a few stitches to help machine start and to avoid sewing in place. A roller presser foot, available for some machines, also works well.

You may also use a stretch or overcast stitch, available on some machines. Make sure they do not produce a "ruffled" edge.

Buttonholes: Use wider spacing than usual on zigzag stitches for machine buttonholes. You may also make bound buttonholes.

Care: All sewing machines need frequent cleaning and oiling when you sew with knits. Be sure to brush out lint often.



Gently stretch while stitching.

SEAMS

"Give": Seams should have some "give". Pull each end of a seam to see if it stretches without breaking. If thread breaks, decrease tension on the thread that broke.

You can also add "give" by stretching as you stitch. Hold the seam in back and in front of the presser foot and gently stretch while stitching. Test until seam looks good, has some "give" and is not over-stretched.

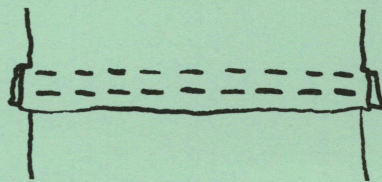
Use a variation of this technique when stitching together pieces of unequal lengths. Put the shortest piece on top and stretch it to the same length as

the longer bottom piece. Be sure stretch is evenly distributed so seam will be smooth.

For lightweight knits, such as lingerie fabrics, loosen tension. Leave at least 4" of thread at beginning and end of seam. Ease the excess thread into the seam with your fingers, stretching a small distance at a time.

Finishes: Usually unnecessary as knits don't ravel.

Allowances: Use standard seam allowance when fabric will stay pressed open. Use 1/4" seam allowance in single-knit fabrics with edges that roll (also acceptable for sportswear). Stitch a second row 1/8" from seam line to keep seam flat, using straight, zigzag or overcast stitch — make sure edge doesn't "ruffle".



Press narrow seams to one side.

Pressing: First press seams flat with right sides together, then press open (standard seam allowance). Use plenty of steam on all knits plus a press cloth on synthetics and wools.

HEMS

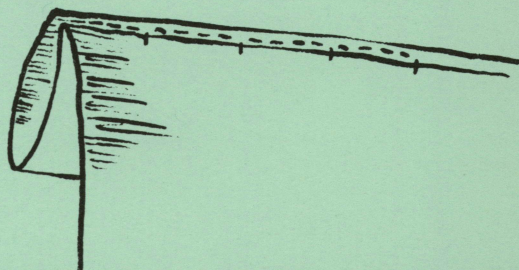
Hems should have "give" and should be inconspicuous. Avoid a wide hem in knits.

Top-stitching: Top-stitched hems are durable and suitable for sportswear. Top-stitch with same regular straight stitch you used in rest of garment; with medium width plain zigzag; or full width multiple zigzag set 12 stitches to the inch.

Machine hemming: Fold back the garment with wrong side up; take several stitches in hem edge, then one in the garment.

Hand hemming: Should be invisible from the right side if you use the right stitch; a catch stitch is good.

Bonding: Fusibles, such as Wonder-Under and Stitch-Witchery, make good hems with "give". (No endorsement of products is intended by the use of trade names.)



Take several stitches in hem edge, then one in garment.

KNIT FABRICS — FIBERS AND TYPES

Yarns in knit fabrics usually run in the same direction — vertically or horizontally, depending on the type of knit. The yarns are interlooped in various ways to produce different types of knits.

Loops give knits their unique quality of "stretch". Loops are also the reason that knits may change shape during laundering or dry cleaning, because the loops may take on different shapes during the cleaning process.

Different types of knits and their characteristics are:

Single knits — definite right and wrong side; lightweight, soft and drapeable; jersey is one familiar type.

Tricots — single knit with vertical wales on the right side and crosswise ribs on the back; run-resistant; relatively stable lengthwise.

Double knits — often look the same on right and wrong sides; some have a surface texture on the right side; many are quite stable with small amount of stretch.

Raschels — lacy, openwork and handmade crocheted look.

Bonded knits — stabilized with backing, usually acetate or nylon tricot; less drapeable than unbonded knits, with some of the natural stretch eliminated; check label instructions for proper care — some are washable, others must be dry cleaned.

Texturized yarns — add bulk, warmth and sometimes additional elasticity to knits.

FIBERS AND TRADE NAMES	ADVANTAGES AND SPECIAL FEATURES	USES	CARE (MARK FIBER CONTENT ON EACH GARMENT)
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Wool	Warm, resilient, will hold pressed pleats.	Double knits — tailor well, good for shaped styling; jerseys — soft styles.	Dry clean; can shrink with too much steam or tumble action in self-service machines.
Cotton	Wrinkle-resistant and absorbent, comfortable for warm weather.	Double knits — dresses and sportswear; single knits — casual clothes; raschels — simple line styles.	Check label instructions on ready-to-wear. Machine wash and dry, hang or lay flat (may need touch-up with steam iron); raschels — wash by hand and wrap in towel to remove excess water; dry on flat surface and block to keep shape.
Polyester Dacron Encron Fortrel Kodel Quintess Trevira	Highly wrinkle-resistant, lightweight but firm, strong, great shape retention, won't sag or bag; many interesting textures, sculptured patterns, raised surface designs or matte jersey.	Pattern selection same as for wool, with addition of raschels for jackets and dresses; crease lines can be pressed to be nearly permanent in some fabrics.	100% polyester — hand wash and drip dry or machine wash using warm water, gentle cycle and mild detergent, drip or dry in dryer, remove immediately and put on hanger; blends may need dry cleaning.
Nylon Antron Caprolan Enkalure	Highly wrinkle-resistant, lightweight, can be made elastic with great recovery for stretch garments; solids, colorful prints, stretch lace, "wet look" fabrics.	Tricots and jerseys — lingerie, softly styled dresses and blouses; stretchy knits and laces — simple garments designed to fit close to body.	Same as for 100% polyester with exception of stretch lace, which must drip dry; do not put in dryer.
Acrylic Acrilan Creslan Orlon	Warm, resilient and lightweight; resemble wool or fur-like fabric; soft hand, resist oil stains; solids, prints.	Pattern selection same as for wool with addition of raschels for jackets and dresses.	Hand wash or use gentle cycle and cool water in machine; wrap in towel to remove excess water; dry on hanger or use lowest heat in dryer (test scrap first); use lowest temperature on iron if needs pressing.
Acetate Avisco Celanese Celaperm Chromspun Estron	Wrinkle-resistant, lightweight, lustrous silk-like appearance.	Tricots and plain jersey — lingerie, softly styled dresses or blouses (styling depends on fabric firmness); raschels — jackets, dresses.	Check fabric label carefully: hand wash, machine wash or dry clean (some acetates retain appearance best if dry cleaned); may need touch-up pressing — use lowest temperature on iron as these fabrics are heat-sensitive.
Triacetate Arnel	Wrinkle-resistant, lightweight, lustrous silk-like appearance; solids, prints, "wet look", permanent pleats and surface-textured fabrics.	Usually softly or simply styled garments.	Check label or test sample: hand wash or machine wash in warm to cool water; drip dry or dryer dry; some bright colors are best dry cleaned; not as heat-sensitive as acetate.

NECKLINE VARIATIONS

You can vary a neckline by cutting a rib strip and sewing it onto the garment. You can change a jewel neckline to: crew neck, mock turtle, turtle-neck, V-neck or square neck with variations.

Do this by cutting the neckline to the shape you want and cutting a rib strip of appropriate width, which is: twice the finished width plus 1/2" for seam allowance. Rib strips are cut shorter than the distance around the neckline, then are stretched while stitching.

When patterns have identical front and back pieces, lower the front neckline about 2" before cutting any of the neckline variations. And remember: if you want a wider trim than the directions call for, cut the neckline proportionately deeper.

To sew rib to neckline: Close ends with 1/4" seam; lightly press open. Fold rib strip in half longwise, wrong sides together, and divide equally into fourths. Then divide neckline equally into fourths and match to points on rib. Sew right sides together with rib on top, stretching it to fit neckline.

SHAPE	CUTTING PATTERN	CUTTING RIB
CREW	Cut on line 3/4" to 1" below high line.*	Cut strip 2 1/2" to 3" wide; length 2/3 distance around neckline, 3/4 distance for self-fabric.
MOCK TURTLE	Cut on high line.*	Cut strip 4" to 5" wide; length 2/3 distance around neckline, 3/4 distance for self-fabric; increase length slightly for firm trim.
TURTLE-NECK	Cut on high line.*	Cut strip 8", 9" or 10" wide; length 1" less than distance around neckline.
V-NECK	Cut same as crew neck; then, at center front, measure 4 1/2" to 5" lower than center back; cut as a "V" to edge of shoulder seam.	Cut strip 2 1/2" to 3" wide; length same as distance around neckline. Begin stitching directly below point of V, leaving about 1" of strip extending beyond where stitching begins. Sew up one side, across back and down to point; pin for mitered corner and stitch closed; fasten down ends with catch stitch and trim excess fabric. Barely stretch on straight edges, stretch across back in ratio of 2" of strip to 3" of neckline, 3" of strip to 4" of fabric for self-fabric.**
SQUARE NECK	Cut same as crew neck. At center front measure 3 1/2" to 4" lower than back, cut straight across to point directly below shoulder seam, then cut straight up to form a right angle, or a square neck.	Cut two strips 2 1/2" to 3" wide: one 2" longer than bottom of square, one slightly longer than remaining distance around neckline; barely stretch across bottom and on straight sides, stretch in 2:3 ratio across back (3:4 for self-fabric). Sew on bottom piece first; sew other strip beginning at a corner; miter the corners and sew closed**; fasten down ends with catch stitch and trim excess fabric.
"UNDERWEAR NECK"	Cut same as crew neck. Then measure center front same as for square neck; round the corners.	Cut strip 2 1/2" to 3" wide; length 2/3 distance around neckline, 3/4 distance for self-fabric. Sew on trim with most stretch across the back and at the rounded front corners; stretch only slightly along straight edges.
TANK TOP	Cut same as crew neck. At center front measure 2 1/2" to 3" lower than back; cut a half circle ending at shoulder seams; taper armhole from a point 1/2" in from shoulder edge to midway down armhole front and back.	No rib; instead, turn under edges 1/2" and top-stitch.
TAB FRONT	Use any collar and tab pattern that fits; trace tab pattern onto pattern being used, cut neckline, collar and tab pieces and follow pattern directions for sewing; use interfacing with buttons and buttonholes.	* High line — neckline that fits closely at base of neck; a jewel neckline. ** For extra-stretchy trim, cut strip length of 1/2 the distance around neckline plus 1".

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