
Active and Leisurewear is some of the most comfortable clothing you own and is simple to sew with techniques that handle the stretchy knit fabric. Both a sewing machine and a serger can do the job, but a serger really stands out as the go to machine for a professional finish. Let's dive in!

Active Wear Patterns

All patterns have a feature called ease. Ease is the difference between the body measurements and the measurements of the finished garment. Because knit fabrics stretch more than woven fabrics, they generally have less ease than a pattern designed for woven fabrics. Patterns designed for knit fabrics will not only say "not suitable for non-stretch fabrics", but will have a guide on the back of the pattern envelope to test just how much the fabric stretches. Swimwear patterns actually have negative ease so the garment will fit snugly even when wet.

Select a pattern based on your measurements compared to those listed on the pattern. Patterns can easily be found that include a size range if you do not exactly match any given size. Some have instructions to guide you through the process of finding the right fit. Always try to sew a test garment or baste the garment together to check fit. The good news is that knit fabrics are very, very forgiving.

Active Wear Supplies

Knit fabric is available in a wide variety of fiber content, stretch and just about everything that can make a fabric unique. Look at any knit fabric you are considering in relation to the pattern or garment you want to own in the end. The pattern will usually suggest a range of fabric types. While many **knit patterns** will use a two-way stretch fabric that stretch from side to side, some garments need a four-way stretch. Consider fiber type. Cotton knit would be comfortable for pajamas and not ideal for a swimsuit.

Match the thread to the fabric, but generally an **all purpose polyester thread** will be your best choice. **Woolly nylon** is a soft non-twisted thread that recommended for the loopers of the serger or in the bobbin of a sewing machine. It is soft against the skin and covers any exposed elastic well to reduce chafing.

Choose elastic for durability and stretch. **Swimsuit elastic** is all rubber and will stand up very well to pool chlorine. Clear polyester elastic is soft and will help a neckline retain shape, but may be too weak for a swimsuit. The width of the elastic depends on its position on the garment and sewing technique. A waistband elastic is generally much wider than elastic used around arms eyes and leg openings. Check for stretch recovery when selecting elastic, if possible.

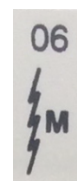
Some sewing machines will want a specialty needle for sewing on knits or they might skip stitches. Use a **Stretch needle** or a **Ball Point needle**. Both have rounded points that penetrate between fabric threads rather than pierce them. Use a ballpoint needle for heavier, looser sweater knits; stretch needle for highly elastic fabrics, like Spandex, or Lycra. (The point of a stretch needle is slightly less rounded than ballpoint.) Test-stitch knits with ballpoint, stretch, and universal needles to see which yields the best results and doesn't cut the fibers of the fabric. If ballpoint needle skips stitches, try a stretch needle.

Construction Seams

Most knit fabrics do not ravel, so they seldom need to be over cast. Knit seams usually do need to have a little stretch in the seam or the seam may pop open as the fabric stretches around the seam.

A three-thread serger overlock seam or serger flat lock seams are both excellent choices for active wear. Both seams are slightly stretchy and durable. A flat lock seam is not recommended for garments with extreme negative ease, but it can be used. The big advantage of a flat lock seam is reduced bulk. A flatter seam reduces the chance of chafing that might occur with a bulky seam rubbing repeatedly against the skin. Another advantage that the serger has over a sewing machine are the larger feed dogs, greater presser foot surface area and the differential feed feature available on many sergers. All these features give the sewist excellent fabric control.

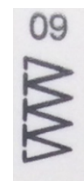
When using a sewing machine for active wear seams, select a stitch the will allow the seam to stretch with the fabric. Many machines have a special stretch stitch or use a very narrow zigzag stitch. The stretch stitch can be very difficult to remove, double check fit and construction details before you sew. This stitch looks a little



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bit like a lightning bolt. The back and forth stitching allows a little give in the seam and the narrow width allows the seam to be pressed open flat.

Some knit seams such as shoulder seams need reinforcement to avoid stretching out over the life of the garment. Choose a stitch that creates a seam while also overcasting the edge. The overcast will hold a stabilizer in place. Insert something to stabilize the seam such as seam tape, clear elastic, some cut away stabilizer or even a soft narrow ribbon. Stitch the seam directly over the stabilizer.



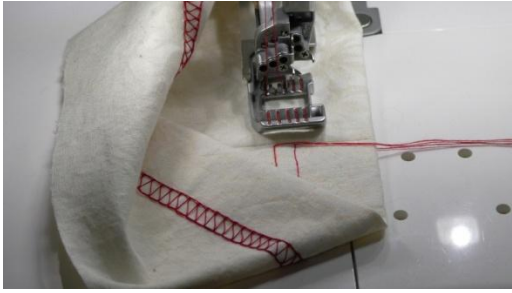
Sewing on the Edges

Hems in knits are usually narrow and need to retain a little stretch. A “cover stitch” created on a serger is the garment industry’s choice, but this can be mimicked on a zigzag sewing machine by using a double needle. Double needles are available in a variety of widths and types. Fold up the hem, press and secure the seam with **wash away tape** or fuse with **Floriani Appli-Kay Wonder** to reduce distortion along the stretchiest direction of the fabric. Use a **roller foot** and loosen the foot pressure to help reduce stretching out the fabric.

An easy two-step elastic edge for knit garments uses elastic and a serger cover stitch or a sewing machine twin needle. Use this technique on a closed opening with no open seams. Sew the edge of the elastic even with the raw edge of the opening on the wrong side of the fabric. Use a three-thread serger stitch or a sewing machine zigzag stitch. Keep the elastic flat against the fabric and not pulled tight. The elastic functions to keep the garment in place on the body and not to change the size of the garment. A slight pull on the elastic will gather and cup the edge of the garment. Use this gathering technique on swimsuit rear leg openings or for a decorative effect. Slightly overlap the ends of the elastic to join.

Turn the elastic to the back with the edge of the elastic forming the opening edge. Stitch the edge with the right side up using a serger cover stitch or a twin needle. Keep the stitch even with the edge. Use a seam guide, markings on the bed of the machine or markings on the foot to help guide the fabric. Use a stylus to help ease the fabric under the foot at the bulky seams.

Technique for Finishing the Cover Stitch in the Round



The cover or chain stitch on the serger will pull out easily from the terminal end. It is the preferred closure for bulk bags like pet food because it is easily removed with a pull of the end threads.



To keep the stitch from unraveling, use this technique to pull the top threads to the back and tie off. When coming around to the beginning of the stitching, overlap the stitching by a few stitches. The serger **Open Toe foot** is perfect for this. Stop the machine with the needle in the highest position. Raise the pressure foot and use a stylus to pass under the foot, but over the fabric from back to front. The two top threads will pull forward as loops on the stylus. Cut both threads about 3-4" from the toe of the foot. Gently pull the fabric towards the back and to the left to just release from under the foot and the feed dogs. After the fabric is just clear, swiftly pull the fabric towards the back and to the left for about 4-5". The top threads will pull to the backside. Cut the cover stitch looper thread and tie the three threads together in an overhand or square knot. Dot the knot with seam sealant such as **Fray Check** and when the sealant is dry, clip the threads.

