



sewing machine NEEDLE guide

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Needles for sewing machines have names and numbers on the needle packet you can refer to. If you have purchased a new machine, then ideally you will also have a packet of basic recommended needles included. If you have an unusual or vintage machine, it is worth checking which type and brand will suit your machine best.

Needle system, e.g. 130/705 H.

Point type, e.g. Universal, Ball Point, Stretch, Denim.

Needle size, e.g. 80/12, 100/16.

Types of sewing machine needle

Universal

This is an all purpose needle most commonly used for sewing garments, and has a slightly rounded point.

Microtex/Sharp

This has an extra sharp point to pierce fibres on tightly woven and delicate fabrics

Stretch

Stretch needles are more rounded than a universal needle and have a longer scarf, (the scarf is an indentation above the needle eye that allows the thread to be grabbed by the bobbin hook under the throat plate to create a stitch) allowing them to work well on very stretchy fabrics. The longer scarf allows space to pick up the bobbin thread, avoiding skipped stitches.

Ballpoint and Jersey needles

These are mostly used for knit fabrics and have the most rounded point. The rounded point slides between the fibers of the fabric rather than piercing them, helping to avoid yarns pulling or breaking in the fabric at the needle holes.

Denim needles:

These are heavy-duty needles suited to heavier weight fabrics. These needles also have a longer scarf to make space for the bobbin thread, helping to avoid skipped stitches on heavy fabrics and thick seams.

Topstitching needles

These needles have an elongated eye to make space for a thicker thread when topstitching. This larger eye allows you to avoid switching to a larger, thicker needle size in a universal needle, which would result in larger holes being made in the fabric.

Needle sizes

There are two main systems used for needle sizes on sewing machines:

European or metric sizes e.g. 70, 80, 90, 100

American or singer sizes e.g. 10, 11, 12, 14, 16

Both sizes are usually written on the needle packet, and sometimes engraved on the needle as well.

Which size needle to use?

The average needle size for light to medium weight fabric is 80/12 to 90/14. Finer fabrics require a lower number needle and thicker fabrics require a higher number. It is best to always test on a scrap of your chosen fabric before beginning a project.

Needle Storage

Unless a needle is blunt (ideally needles are designed to be replaced after approximately 8 hours of sewing) or broken, it is best to return it to the original packaging when changing for a different type of needle. This saves lots of time with a magnifying glass trying to work out later which needle it is! Some needle brands now also have a colour-coded band on the needle, which has greatly improved needle identification.