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Tondl, Rose Marie, "NF00-419 Sewing with Lycra® Blends" (2000). *Historical Materials from University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension*. 1183.

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Published by Cooperative Extension, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources,
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Sewing with Lycra® Blends

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What are Lycra® blend fabrics? The word Lycra® is a trade name for Spandex. Spandex is a man-made elastic fiber made by Du Pont. The name was coined from the word expand. Fabrics that have a stretching quality contain Lycra®, such as fabrics for swimwear, exercisewear and foundation garments. Lycra® is being blended with natural and synthetic fibers. The fabric may be knit or woven.

The advantage of adding a small percentage of Lycra® is that it provides a degree of stretch to the fabric, greater resistance to wrinkling and retains garment shape. Fabrics may have 25 to 40 percent stretch. Woven Lycra® fabrics allow sewers to more closely fit a pattern. Close-fitting pants made with Lycra® blends have less of a tendency to bag at the seat and knees.

Patterns

Select patterns where you want to have extra comfort such as activewear, pants, fitted jackets and straight skirts. Avoid patterns with too much detail as it is difficult to steam press and flatten the edges.

Preshrink

Cotton/Lycra® and linen/Lycra® need to be machine washed and dried at medium temperatures. Steam a wool/Lycra® blend with the iron slightly above the fabric. Hand wash silk/Lycra® and air dry.

Layout/Cutting

Determine the stretch of the fabric and lay the pattern with the stretch going around the body. Square the crosswise grain since off-grain fabrics are difficult to straighten. Use sharp, fine pins and cut with sharp shears or a rotary cutter and mat.

Marking

Use marking pens, soap slivers, chalk, tailor tacks or tracing paper. Test your markers on a scrap of fabric.

Interfacing

Use a lightweight fusible interfacing suitable for the weight of the fabric and for support where

needed.

Needles

Select a stretch needle for woven fabrics and a ballpoint for knits. Depending on fabric weight use 75/11, 80/12, 90/14, or 70/10 for nylon/Lycra®.

Sewing

Set the stitch length at 2 to 2.5 mm or 10 to 12 stitches per inch and a small zig-zag at 1 to 1.5 mm, to put stretch into the seams. Use good quality, long staple polyester thread. Test the stitches after sewing by stretching the seam as much as possible. If it breaks, loosen the top thread tension and test again until the threads do not break. A three- or four-thread serger may be used with wooly nylon in both loopers. Consider topstitching near the finished edges of collars, hems, and front openings.

Seam Finishes

On woven fabrics, test using pinked and stitched, seam tape, zig zag or serge seam allowances separately. Using wooly nylon in a bobbin will help avoid thread imprints on the right side of the fabric when finishing seams. Another finish would be to press seam allowances to one side and then topstitch.

Pressing

Press with a steam iron. Use a press cloth to prevent any shine on the right side of the fabric.

Hemming

For woven fabric, finish the edge of the hem using a serger or bind with sheer, nylon bias tape. Topstitch using a twin needle or hand stitch. For knit fabric, use the cover hem (two stitched lines on top of fabric with a serged stitch on the underside) if you have it on your serger, a flatlock serged hem or turn under fabric and topstitch with a twin needle.

***File NF419 under TEXTILES, CLOTHING AND DESIGN
C-13, Construction
Issued March 2000***

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Elbert C. Dickey, Director of Cooperative Extension, University of Nebraska, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

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