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EC65-440 Stretch Fabrics

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AS YOU SEW

E.C. 65-440

STRETCH FABRICS

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Clothing Specialist

A stretch fabric is one that stretches and then contracts, or recovers, when it is no longer in a stretched position. This stretch quality can add comfort, shape retention, wrinkle resistance and longer wear to a fabric.

Types of Stretch Are:

1. Warp, which stretches lengthwise or in a vertical direction. (North-south stretch)
2. Filling, which stretches crosswise or in a horizontal direction. (East-west stretch)
3. Two-way, a combination of warp and filling stretch.

Some Stretch Fabrics Are Made:

1. From yarns that are spun around a core of elastic material such as spandex. These are called "core spun" stretch yarns.
2. From synthetic yarns that have a twist or loop set in them by heat before the yarn is made into fabric.
3. From fibers that are chemically and mechanically treated, after they are woven, to crimp the yarns and shrink the fabric (called slack mercerization).

When Buying Stretch Fabric:

1. Consider how you will use it. Fabric for active sportswear needs a greater stretch and recovery property than one used for spectator sportswear.
2. Choose one that has more stretch than you really need for a satisfactory term of service.
3. Consider where and how you want the

fabric to stretch as you decide whether to buy lengthwise or crosswise stretch. Lengthwise is generally used for pants and crosswise for dresses, blouses, skirts and jackets.

4. Read the label and decide on quality as with other fabrics.

When Choosing the Pattern:

1. Choose the same size pattern as you would ordinarily buy.
2. Choose a pattern with simple lines and as few pattern pieces as possible. Avoid designs with too many seams. The use of stretch fabric may be suggested on the pattern envelope.

Preparation for Cutting

1. Pre-shrink by dipping in warm water or by steam pressing, unless label states the fabric has been preshrunk.
2. Fabric should be completely dry and relaxed before cutting. Some recommend leaving fabric on cutting table to relax for twenty-four hours.
3. Place pattern pieces in the direction of the desired stretch. For example a suit jacket is laid with the crosswise stretch across the shoulder blades.
4. Lay $1/4"$ to $1/2"$ tuck in the crotch of a regular pants pattern and shorten the leg length slightly for a smoother fit. The stretch of the fabric takes care of the comfort.
5. Keep fabric as flat as possible and pin with sharp dressmaker pins placed at right angles to the direction of stretch.
6. Use sharp shears for cutting to avoid stretching or distorting the fabric.

Machine Stitching

1. Use a thread that has some elasticity if possible. Textured nylon such as Taslan stretches with the fabric. Regular nylon and silk have more give than mercerized cotton thread.

2. Set the machine for a medium short stitch (about 15 stitches per inch) or a short narrow zig-zag. If using a straight stitch hold the fabric taut while stitching.

3. Use a fine to medium machine needle depending on the weight of the fabric.

4. Test stitch on a sample of the stretch fabric to see if the seam has give. Both upper and lower tension may need to be loosened. A light pressure is suggested.

Seams

1. Plain seams provide the most "give."

2. Seam allowance edges can be finished with a zig-zag stitch, hand overcast or by using a regular machine stitch placed $1/8$ " to $1/4$ " from the edge.

3. Seams where no "give" is desired, such as the top of the shoulder seam, may be stayed by stitching tape in the seam.

Plackets or Closing

1. Zippers may be applied in the usual way. If the fabric is lightweight, a strip of press-on, non-woven interfacing can be placed along the seamline on the front side of the garment.

2. Waistbands cut in the opposite direction of the stretch will be firm and won't stretch.

3. Buttonholes may be stayed with interfacing to prevent stretching or they may be made in opposite direction of the stretch.

Fitting

1. To obtain the "stretched look" the garment is fitted more snugly than a regular fabric. Fitting too tightly is not considered good taste.

2. "Comfort" stretch has the conventional look and is fitted as a regular fabric.

Hems

Tailor's hems will provide more "give" than a taped hem. To make a tailor's hem: finish the cut edge by machine overcasting or stitching and pinking; and slip stitch in place by hand so the stitch is concealed. Short, loose hand stitches are suggested.

Interfacings and Linings

1. Interfacing helps to stabilize the outer fabric where stretch is not desired, such as: buttonholes, collars, cuffs, lapels.

2. Lining inhibits the stretch of fabric. If lining is used (for a jacket as an example) it should have the same percentage of stretch as the outer fabric. A tricot knit is a possibility.

Pressing

1. The temperature setting of the iron depends on the fiber content of the fabric. Avoid high settings when synthetic fibers are present.

2. Press as you sew: Set the iron down and lift it to avoid stretching the fabric with the iron. Press with a minimum of steam or use a dry iron and press cloth.

Care

1. Stretch garments need to "rest" between wearings so fabric will be restored to its original dimension.

2. Most stretch garments may be either dry cleaned or laundered. Check the label for specific instructions. If laundering, pretreat stains, use warm water (105°) and a short washing cycle. A cool rinse keeps wrinkles from setting. Don't use chlorine bleach unless label recommends it.

3. An automatic dryer may be used to restore shape to stretch fabrics. Use heat, stored in the dryer after use, or set the temperature dial according to the fabric. Tumble with a clean, damp Turkish towel 10 to 20 minutes.

4. Lengthwise stretch garments may be stored by folding and placing on shelves or in drawers.

5. Crosswise stretch may be hung on hangers.