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## EC65-445 Wash and Wear Fabrics

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AS YOU SEW

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# Wash and Wear Fabrics

By Gerda Petersen  
Clothing Specialist

"Wash & Wear" or "Easy Care" are terms that are often used interchangeably. They refer to fabrics that can be washed, dried and worn again with little or no ironing needed.

Seersucker dress fabric and cotton knit T shirts have been manufactured for many years. These might be considered as examples of the original "Wash & Wear" garments. Newer wash and wear fabrics are usually one of three types:

## 1. Fabrics made of 100% synthetic fibers.

Some examples are: nylon, Dacron polyester, Orlon acrylic. These are highly crease resistant and keep their original shape.

## 2. Fabrics made of blends or combinations of fibers.

Some combinations that make satisfactory wash and wear are:

65% Dacron polyester.....35% cotton  
55% Dacron polyester.....45% rayon  
65% Dacron polyester.....35% linen  
55% Kodol polyester.....45% rayon  
70% Acrilan Acrylic.....30% rayon  
80% Acrilan Acrylic.....20% cotton  
70% Acrilan Acrylic.....30% wool  
70% Orlon Acrylic.....30% rayon  
80% Orlon Acrylic.....20% cotton  
70% Orlon Acrylic.....30% wool

Fabrics that also have satisfactory wash and wear characteristics are often made of three or more fibers used in blends or combinations.

## 3. Fabrics or fibers that have been given a chemical treatment.

A resin finish is most commonly used. Cotton, linen, rayon and wool are examples of those given a chemical treatment.

Permanent press is a recent development. It is claimed to produce fabrics which need no pressing at all. The fabric is treated with resin at the textile mill, then it is passed through an oven. The heat cures the cloth giving it a "flat memory" which is supposed to return the fabric to its original smooth surface after washing.

## Facts About the Fabric

Some of the same qualities that make fabrics crease-resistant, quick drying and easy to care for will also make them more difficult to sew. For example:

1. They are more resistant to pins, needles, scissors.
2. They resist easing, shaping, or molding (as in sleeves).
3. Seam puckering may be a problem.
4. Since finishes used on these types of fabrics are permanent any distortion of the fabric grain will be permanent. It will not be possible to straighten the fabric grain. It is important to check the straightness of the fabric grain before buying the fabric; especially plaids and prints.



### Selecting the Pattern

1. Choose a pattern with few seams and intricate details. As much as possible avoid patterns with seams on the straight of goods to avoid seam puckering.
2. Dolman, kimono or raglan sleeves are good because they don't require easing into a sleeve cap.
3. Pleats and darts give ease with less apparent bulk than do gathers.

### Selecting Interfacing, Zippers, Thread, etc.

1. Select interfacings and linings that have the same type of wash and wear qualities as the outer fabric.
2. Zippers generally have cotton tape that needs to be preshrunk.
3. Thread of nylon or Dacron is best for synthetic "wash and wear." Mercerized cotton is suitable for cotton fabrics and blends.

### Laying the Pattern and Cutting

1. If cutting off grain fabric that cannot be straightened, lay the straight grain marking of pattern on the lengthwise grain of the fabric, parallel to the selvage and disregard the crosswise grain. Since the finish holds the shape, this will give the garment the best hang. Cut off-grain fabrics singly.
2. Use sharp dressmaker pins or needles and a sharp shears.
3. Transfer pattern markings by using tailor's chalk or tailor's tacks. Avoid wax type marking because it tends to stain when pressed. Strong contrast in dressmakers' carbon paper should also be avoided. (Test a sample before using.)

### Construction Techniques

1. Baste by hand or pin outside stitching line to prevent marking.
2. Use a fine sharp sewing machine needle for lightweight fabrics. A heavy fabric will require a heavier needle.
3. Make a test seam using two strips of fabric about 2" by 10" long that are exactly the same size. Place a pin about 1" from the bottom. Keeping the two strips even, stitch down the center to the pin. If there is a bubble or pucker the two layers are not traveling evenly. This means the pressure on the presser foot is too great or the feed dog is set too high. Adjust the pressure. Check the length of stitch (10 to 14 stitches per inch depending on the weight of the fabric). The stitch should be balanced. A looser tension is usually needed. Each type of wash and wear calls for a separate machine adjustment.
4. Apply a little tension to fabric behind and in front of the needle being careful not to pull the fabric through the machine. This will help to reduce seam pucker.
5. Sew at a moderate, even pace. If stitching with a zig zag machine, use the throat plate with the round hole to prevent drawing fabric into the hole.
6. If slipperiness is a problem, stitch on tissue paper.
7. Plan for a generous seam allowance, which could be finished to prevent fraying by turning seam edge under and stitching by hand over casting or by zigzagging.
8. Distribute the fullness in the hem evenly by using an ease stitch. Use a hem finish that doesn't require a seam tape if possible.



9. Setting in sleeves without puckers requires careful handling. Here are suggestions:

a. Eliminate extra fullness in a sleeve cap by making a 1/4" fold across the sleeve cap above the notches. It may be necessary to lengthen the shoulder seam 1/2" to compensate. This adjustment is good for all except those who have a fleshy upper arm.

b. Set in the sleeve by:

Using two rows of ease stitching between the notches around the cap of the sleeve. One row should be on the stitching line and one row 1/8" to 1/16" nearer the seam edge.

Match top of sleeve to shoulder seam.

Match dots and notches. Fullness should be eased in the bias area of the sleeve cap. The top of sleeve cap is cut on the straight grain and should be stitched without ease for about 1 1/2".

Steam press sleeve cap before stitching sleeve into armhole.

Pin or baste sleeve in place. Stitch carefully with eased side of sleeve turned upward.

### CARE

1. Don't allow garments to become heavily soiled and stained because they won't wash clean easily.
2. Pretreat greasy stains and collar and cuff lines with soap or detergent before laundering. Greasy stains might also be pretreated with a solvent.
3. Don't overcrowd the washer.
4. Wash like fabrics together because they may pick up lint and color from each other. Wash white articles separately.
5. For moderate soil, cool water and a liquid detergent is effective and produces the least amount of wrinkling. It doesn't always remove all wear wrinkles.
6. For heavier or greasy soil use warm or hot water with either soap or detergent.
7. Slower machine agitation means less wrinkling.
8. Use medium to low dryer heat. Place on a hanger immediately after removing from dryer, being careful not to over dry.

### Pressing

1. Begin with a low iron setting and test the iron on a scrap of cloth.
2. Use the iron temperature that is suggested for that fiber in a blend that is most easily harmed by heat.
3. Press on the wrong side.