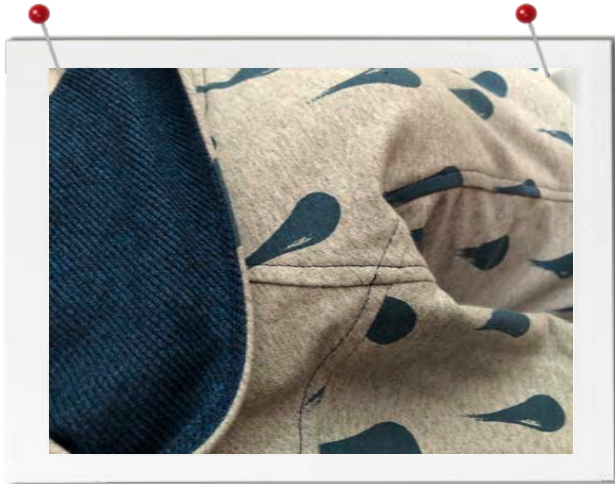


Fact Sheet: Knit Fabric

How to sew with knit fabric by Bree Ledingham



This fact sheet contains all the information you need when sewing knit fabric on a BERNINA sewing machine and overlocker. However if you own a bernette sewing machine or overlocker the information is still relevant to you. Happy stitching 😊

Needles

There are many different types of needles on the market today so it can be confusing. There are three main needles that we use to sew knit fabric, and all three can be used in both a BERNINA sewing machine and overlocker.

Light Ball Point



Light or SES ballpoint needles are designed for lighter weight knit fabric. This would be most of the garments you would make in summer like t-shirts or dresses. They can also be used for some winter knits that are lighter, like a fine merino wool.

Medium Ball Point



Medium, Jersey or SUK ballpoint needles or for heavier knit fabric. They are perfect for fleeces and double knits, as well as things like French Terry and Ponte. You would use these fabrics to make winter garments like hoodies and thicker coats.

If you are ever unsure if you should use a light or medium ball point, it is always better to start with the light as they have a finer point

Stretch Needle



Stretch needles are designed for both woven and knit fabric that have a higher elastane/Lycra content. These fabrics are extra “springy” and often cause stitches to skip or look wobbly. A stretch needle will help compensate for that and keep your stitch looking nice. Check the tag when buying your fabric to see if it contains elastane/Lycra. If you are not sure, try a ballpoint first and then change to a stretch if you are having an issue.

Threads

Not all threads are created equal and a poor quality thread will show on knit fabric. It will be more prone to breaking and shredding as well as skipped or mis-formed stitches. It is really important to use a good quality thread like Mettler Metrosene. Metrosene is 100% polyester and very strong and great for the sewing machine. Mettler Seracor is also great thread for the Overlocker. There are other good brands out there, but I do recommend that you stick with polyester and not cotton as it is much stronger for garments.



Stitch Selection

It can be hard to know what stitch to use when sewing knit on your machine.

Firstly, you can just use a standard straight stitch. Straight stitch does have a small amount of give and can be used on any seam that does not have to be stretched across the body. This is actually most seams of knit garments unless they are very body fitting. Using straight stitch will also help to stabilise things like necklines and shoulder seam. If you are using straight stitch, I recommend that you increase the length to 3mm.

If your seam is required to stretch, you are best to use the standard stretch stitch (stitch #11 on the 7 series, check your manual for the number on your model).



The stretch stitch has a small kick that will allow your fabric to stretch out after it has been sewn (for maximum stretch use an overlocker, see below). I do recommend that you change the default length of the stitch to 2.5mm. This will not change the look or effectiveness of the stitch, it will however feed the fabric better and make for easier unpicking should the need arise.



Presser Foot

You can sew knit with the standard presser foot #1, however you will often get the issue of the fabric fluting and waving as you stitch. This can be subtle of some knits, and more pronounced on others.

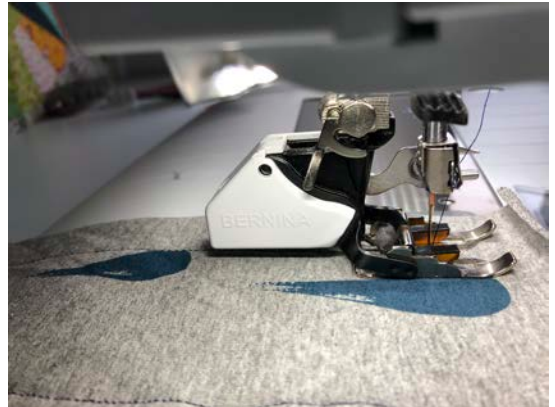


The waving is caused by the feed teeth stretching out the fabric as you sew. There are a few ways to compensate for this. Firstly you can lower the Presser Foot Pressure (not available on all models, check your manual to confirm). The Presser foot Pressure indicator will be either on screen or a dial on the side of your machine. It is best to decrease the pressure to just above half. For example the default on a 7 series is 50, I recommend lowering it to 30.



This also means that you can use other presser feet if you wish, and still stop the waving and fluting. Just remember to change the pressure back to normal when you have finished with you knit.

Another way to stop the waving is to use the Walking Foot. The Walking Foot's extra feeding mechanism helps ensure that the fabric does not stretch as it is being stitch.



If using the Walking Foot, I recommend that you attached the closed toe sole, for maximum fabric support.

- Do not use a Walking Foot and lower the Presser Foot Pressure. Use one or the other but not both at the same time*

Overlocker

The overlocker is a fantastic option for knit fabric as it will give your seams maximum stretch ability. This is perfect for things like body suits and bathers.

Having your overlocker set up as a 4 thread (two needles) means that you do not have to stitch your garment on the sewing machine first, you can do it all on the overlocker. However you are likely to have the same issue of a waving and fluted seam.



This is again being caused by the feed teeth stretching out the fabric as it is being stitched. The way to compensate for that is to engage the Differential Feed. The Differential Feed control alters the way the fabric is feed into the overlocker and will stop the waving. The standard Differential Feed setting for woven fabric is 1 or N



Always do a test of your fabric on 1 or N first. Then if you see the waving, increase the Differential Feed to 1.5.



Test the fabric at 1.5 and see if that has fixed the issue.



If the waving is better, but still not 100% gone, increase the Differential feed to 2

Always remember to change your Differential Feed back to 1/N when finished.

If you are planning on using your sewing machine to construct your garment and the overlocker to finish the edges, you can use it as a 3 thread and still engage Differential feed.

Twin Needles

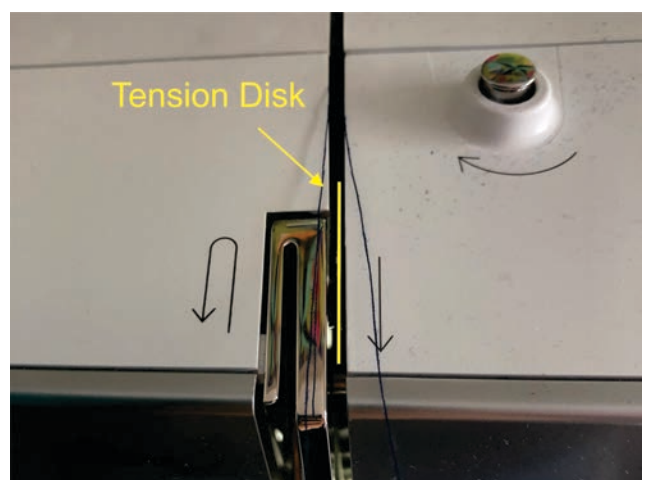
Most knit garments that are purchased have the hems and topstitching are sewn by a Coverstitch machine. These machines give you two rows of stitching on top and an overlock on the back. If you are planning on stitching lots of knit garments, a Coverstitch machine can be a good investment.

However you can also use twin needle to mimic the look of Coverstitch. Stitching with a twin needle will give you two straight rows on top and a zig zag on the back. It will also allow the garment to stretch after sewing.

It is important that you purchase a Stretch Twin needle. They are available in 2.5mm or 4mm spacing. I recommend the 2.5mm for light knits and the 4mm for heavier.

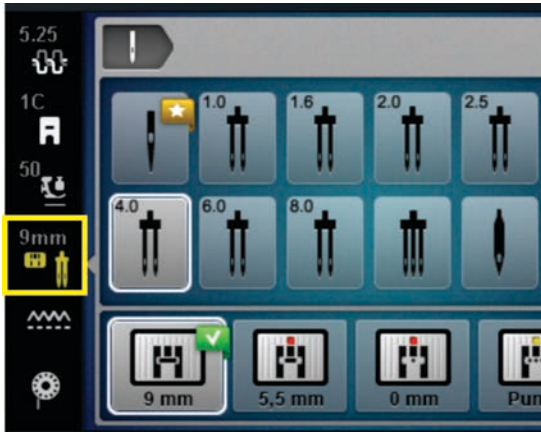


It is vital that you thread your machine correctly for twin needle. To do this make sure the left and right threads go to the left and right side of the tension disk.



If your machine has an inbuilt safety program, it's a good idea to tell it you are using a twin needle. This will ensure that you don't accidentally change a setting that could lead to the needle breaking. Check your machine manual for more information.

If the Zig Zag stitch on the back does not look correct, you may need to increase the upper thread tension. Start by raising it 1 whole number and continue until you are happy.



Sometimes when using a twin needle it may be necessary to adjust the upper thread tension. Always test first on a scrap of fabric.

If you find your fabric is raising between two rows of stitching, lower your upper thread tension. Start by lowering it 1 whole number and keep testing until you are happy.

* Depending on your fabric, it may not always be possible to get the front and back of the twin needle looking perfect. If this is the case, always try and make the top look the best it can as the back is rarely seen*

