

Sewing with Spandex, Lycra and other stretch fabrics

General Tips

Two way stretch can be used, but may run.

Four way stretch (75%-80%) is the best choice. Position most stretch around body.

Use a new, ballpoint needle to minimize skipped stitches.

Wash fabric before cutting and sewing to minimize skipped stitches

Use good quality polyester thread in matching or neutral color.

If dyeing AFTER construction, consider thread color. Polyester thread will not take dye.

Because seam allowances might need to be trimmed before fitting, plan on making an accurate, disposable mock-up

Use stay tape or narrow strips of interfacing to stabilize shoulder seams or when inserting zippers.

Regular construction seams

Use a narrow, moderately tight zigzag stitch, serpentine stitch or special (forward and back) stretch stitch.

Do not stitch with tiny stitches. Stitches that are too close together can “perforate” the fabric and weaken seam.

Use three-thread serger stitch with wooly nylon in loopers

Leg Lines

Method 1

- Trim seam allowance to 3/8” at leg line.
- Measure elastic, removing 1/2” to 3/4” for every 5-6” of length.
- Stitch elastic to wrong side of Lycra with triple zigzag or serpentine stitch. Match elastic edge to cut edge of fabric.
- Stretch elastic more along backside of leg line.
- Fold Lycra along edge of elastic and stitch in place, using triple zigzag, serpentine stitch or double needle.

Method 2

- Measure elastic, removing 1/2” to 3/4” for every 5-6” of length
- Align edge of elastic along stitching line.
- Serge elastic to Lycra, using wooly nylon thread in the loopers. BE CAREFUL NOT TO CATCH THE ELASTIC UNDER THE SERGER BLADE!
- Stretch the elastic to fit, stretching more along backside of leg line.
- Fold Lycra along edge of elastic and stitch in place, using triple zigzag, serpentine stitch or double needle.

Waistbands

In stretch fabric, use methods described above, but with wider (1”) non-roll elastic.

In woven and non-stretch fabrics, make a double casing and insert two rows of 1/4” elastic for a smooth, non-roll finish.

Types of elastic

- Swimwear elastic—resistant to chlorine.
- Regular woven elastic—good for dancewear, do not use in swimwear
- Non-roll elastic—woven with stiff, vertical “bars” to minimize rolling or folding
- Knitted elastic—soft and stretchy, good for waistbands
- Horsehair elastic—non-roll, good for waist stays and strapless foundations
- Lingerie elastic—soft and stretchy with a picot edge, good for soft edge finishes.
- Fold over elastic braid—strong and durable, good for “fashion” finishes.
- Clear elastic—resistant to chlorine, good for swimwear and dancewear
- Buttonhole elastic—about 1” wide with evenly spaced buttonholes through center. Good for attaching bodices to skirts.
- Gripper elastic—with exposed rubber to grip skin and minimize creeping
- Baby elastic—soft and flexible, but too soft for dancewear.

Sources

Richard the Thread (Los Angeles) www.richardthethread.com

Greenberg and Hammer (New York)) www.greenberghammer.com

Newark Dressmaker Supply www.newarkdress.com

Lace and Lycra Fabric 10’ wide Lycra! www.laceandfabric.com

Spandex World (New York) www.spandexworld.com

Spandex House (New York) power net, Dry-Tek) www.spandexhouse.com

Sew Sassy (Bra, swimsuit and lingerie fabric, patterns and notions) sewsassy.com

Stretch House (New York) www.stretchhouse.com

MB Tex Wholesale (New Jersey) www.mbtexfabrics.com

Spandex Warehouse (Los Angeles) spandexwarehouse.net

Green Pepper (Patterns) thegreenpepper.com

Kwik Sew Company (men’s women’s and children’s patterns) www.kwiksew.com

Blog about making catsuits www.stretchy.org

Spandex doesn’t grow on trees

Spandex—or elastane—is a synthetic fiber known for its exceptional elasticity. It is stronger and more durable than rubber, its major non-synthetic competitor. It was invented in 1959 by DuPont chemist Joseph Shivers. When first introduced, it revolutionized many areas of the clothing industry.

"Spandex" is a generic name and not derived from the chemical name of the fiber, as are most manufactured fibers, but an extension of the word expand. "Spandex" is the preferred name in North America; elsewhere it is referred to as "elastane".

The most famous brand name associated with spandex is Lycra, a trademark of Invista (formerly part of DuPont). Such is the prominence of the Lycra brand that it has become a genericised trademark in many parts of the world, used to describe any kind of spandex. Invista discourages such use, protecting its trademark vigorously.

Other spandex trademarks include Elasthan, ROICA & Dorlastan and Linel. Lycra is commonly blended with other fabrics such as nylon or cotton.