Point Well Taken

The Guide to Success with Needles & Threads

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What is a Machine Needle?

Webster’s New World Dictionary defines needle as “a small, slender, sharp-pointed piece of steel with a hole for thread, used for sewing.”

Point: One of the main differences between needles is the type of point. Points can be sharp, ball-point, knife blade, or universal, and needles are generally named for their type of point. You’ll select a point type that works well with your fabric selection, which we’ll discuss in detail later under Basic Needles and Special Purpose Needles.

Eye: The eye is the hole through which the thread passes. As the needle size increases, the size of the eye increases.

Shank: The shank is the part of the needle that is inserted into the machine. Today’s machine needles have a shank with a flat back, so you won’t insert them backwards. The shank size increases as the needle size increases.

Shaft: The shaft is the body of the needle. The needle size on the package is an indication of the relative thickness of the shaft.

Scarf: The scarf is the indentation at the back of the needle around the eye. A stitch is formed when the bobbin shuttle swings into the scarf, and hooks into the looped needle thread. The long scarf on the universal, sharp, and ball-point needles helps to eliminate skipped stitches.

Front Groove: The front groove allows thread to remain close to the needle as it travels down the needle towards the bobbin. The deep groove of some needles helps to protect threads from friction created when piercing the fabric. If the needle is too fine for the size of the thread, there is not enough room for the thread in the groove, resulting in faulty stitches.

Size: Needle size refers to the shaft diameter. There are two sizing systems for needles. The European size refers to the needle size in hundredths of millimeters, ranging from 60 to 120. The American designation is an arbitrary number from 8 to 21. Often, manufacturers list both the European and American numbers, such as 70/10 — the number before the slash is the European size, and the number after the slash is the American size. Not all needle types come in every size. With both sizing systems, the larger the number, the larger the needle.

The sizing system of machine needles is opposite from the one used for handsewing needles. With machine needles, larger numbers mean larger needles. Handsewing needles always get smaller as their number increases, but the numbers are not consistent from one category to another.
Checking the Stitch Width

When using zigzag or decorative stitch, select the twin needle setting on your machine or check the stitch width by turning the hand wheel manually through the entire stitch pattern. Make sure neither needle hits the presser foot. Even though some computerized machines have a double needle setting, it is important to check stitch width by manually turning the hand wheel. Machines are often preset for a specific double needle width. It is also possible that manually checking the stitch width through the entire stitch will allow the machine to complete the stitch, but when actually sewing, the needle will break. Pay particular attention to the needle when hand checking; the needle may bend slightly when manually stitching, but the speed of the machine sewing will cause the needle to break.

NOTE: Extra-wide twin needles require a specific minimum zigzag stitch width. The 6.0 needle requires a minimum 6.5mm zigzag, and the 8.0 needle requires a 9mm zigzag.

Double Hemstitch

(ZWIHO) This needle has a wing needle on the left and a universal needle on the right to create a desired hole called hemstitching. Use it with a variety of decorative stitches to create heirloom stitching. Double hemstitch needles can only be used on zigzag machines that thread from front to back. As with the twin / double needles, be careful to check stitch width or select the sewing machine double needle button.

Jeans Twin

(H-J ZWI) See page 6 for more information on jeans twins.

Stretch Twin

(H-S ZWI) See page 7 for more information on stretch twins.

Embroidery Twin

(H-E ZWI) This twin needle has two embroidery needles attached to the single shank. See page 11 for more information on embroidery needles.

This needle comes in two different sizes, 2.0/75 and 3.0/75.

Double Metallica Needle

This twin needle has two metallica needles attached to the single shank. See page 11 for more information on metallica needles.

This needle comes in size 2.5/80.
Hand Quilting Threads

Hand quilting threads have a glacé coating (a traditional wax coating applied to the surface of the thread) to keep them free of kinks and knots. Do not use this thread in the sewing machine because the coating will come off on the tension disks and other machine parts.

**TIP:** Hand quilting thread is great for hand basting because it doesn’t twist or knot.

- **Mettler Hand Quilting Thread**
  This is an extra-strong, cotton-wrapped polyester thread with a waxed finish. This thread comes in 30 colors.

- **Gütermann Hand Quilting Thread**
  This 100% cotton thread has a special glacé finish that gives it tangle-free strength. It comes in 50 colors and is suitable for hand sewing only.

Machine Quilting Threads

- **Mettler Silk Finish 100% Cotton Machine Quilting Thread**
  This thread is suitable for both machine and hand quilting. It is 40/3, comes in 30 colors, and the spools have brown writing for easy identification.

- **DMC Quilting Thread**
  DMC’s quilting thread is 30% cotton and 70% polyester, and can be used for both hand and machine quilting. This thread is strengthened with a unique InterGlazed™ process, a treatment interwoven into the fibers. It is available in 30 colors.

- **Gütermann Natural Cotton**
  This 100% mercerized cotton thread is available on 100 and 250 meter spools.

**TIP:** For quilting, use a 40 weight thread to blend in to the quilt design. Use a 30 weight thread to highlight the quilting stitches.

**TIP:** Piece using cotton thread for a quilt that lasts and stands up to repeated washings.
Machine Accessory Feet

This is not an exhaustive list of machine accessory feet, but the ones listed here are particularly useful for embellishment. Check with your machine dealer to see if a particular foot is available for your machine. Generic feet will fit many machines. Little Foot, Ltd. and Creative Feet™ make special feet that fit nearly all machines.

**Appliqué / Embroidery / Satin Stitch or Zigzag**

This foot has a groove on the bottom to accommodate a heavy build-up of wide satin and decorative stitches. Some appliqué feet have “open toes” or are clear, giving a good view of the stitching path.

**Darning Foot / Quilting Foot / Big Foot**

Use this foot for free-motion quilting. The Big Foot, manufactured by Little Foot, Ltd., is a large foot which helps to hold fabric down against the bed of the machine while quilting.

**Blind Hem**

This foot has a fabric guide and a stitch bar that ensures the right stitch tension for “invisible” hemming. This foot, as well as the edgestitch foot, can be used for edgestitching and appliqué.

**Braiding / Couching / Cording**

This foot has either a one large hole and deep groove for couching one thick fiber or the foot has several holes or grooves for couching several fibers at once.

**Cordonnet Foot**

This foot has a small hole to hold a thin fiber in place for couching, gathering, or making corded pin tucks.

**Gathering**

This foot allows you to gather a single layer of fabric or gather one layer of fabric and stitch it to another layer of flat fabric in one step.

**Little Foot™ / Patchwork / ¼” Foot**

This foot helps you stitch an accurate ¼” seam. The Little Foot™ is manufactured by Little Foot, Ltd. and is also marked for stitching an accurate ¹⁄₈” seam.

**Overcast / Overlock Foot**

This foot has a fabric guide and bar that holds fabric and stitches flat, making it great for a satin stitch edge finish.

**Pearls & Piping™**

This foot is manufactured by Creative Feet™ and has a deep channel to pass smoothly over cording, decorative fibers, crosslocked beads, and rhinestones up to ¼” in thickness.
Other Helpful Products

Irons
This book is about needles and threads, but it’s also essential to have a good-quality iron that can produce a lot of steam as well as a second iron for fusing, crafting, and kids’ projects. Rowenta and Bernina offer excellent irons. For a professional look, always press as you sew. Whenever possible, press seams as sewn, then press open. A press cloth is helpful — make one from a piece of silk organza.

Stabilizers
Stabilizers provide necessary backing and support. They eliminate shifting, puckering, and sliding of fabrics when doing appliqué, buttonholes, embroidery, free-motion work, punch needle, charted needlework, and monograms. They make it easy to move or turn the fabric without getting snagged on the feed dogs. Use stabilizers for temporary body and transferring designs. Most come in pre-cut packages or on bolts, and are available in different weights. Depending on their type, stabilizers are usually removed after sewing by tearing them away, dissolving them in water, or disintegrating them with heat from an iron. Which one to use is up to you unless a project requires a particular type.

When you use more than one layer of stabilizer, tear or cut away the layers separately to avoid pulling your stitches.

Tear-Away Stabilizers
Tear-away stabilizers are very helpful, but they tend to distort stitches somewhat when torn away, and they can leave “whiskers” or “eyelashes” behind. They are available in white (for light fabrics) and black (for dark fabrics). Because the stabilizer remains under the stitching, match the weight of the stabilizer to the weight of the fabric. Heavy and “crisp” stabilizers need to be cut away with scissors, not torn, or they will distort your stitches and fabric.

• **HTC Easy Stitch™**
  Easy Stitch is a non-woven stabilizer that is evenly perforated with small holes for easy removal.

• **Sulky® Tear Easy, Stitch & Tear®, Tear Away Soft**
  These are lightweight stabilizers.

• **Tear Away Crisp**
  This stabilizer works well with heavier fabrics and monogramming on towels.

• **Stitch and Ditch**
  This thin paper stabilizer does not leave a residue of powder or dust in the machine and bobbin area. It has a low acid content, is easy to tear away, and does not dull the machine needle. It is also good for paper piecing, quilting, and heirloom sewing.
Everyone who sews needs
Point Well Taken!

Everything you ever wanted to know about basic, special purpose, and decorative needles and sewing threads — all in one resource!

Information on couching and bobbinwork

Thorough, helpful charts for
Basic Needles & Threads,
Decorative Needles & Threads,
and Twin Needles

Wonderful tips and hints to improve your sewing