Selection and care of SWEATERS and KNIT APPAREL

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Knit outer garments are becoming increasingly popular as technology improves fibers and fabrics and as the consumer finds knits attractively styled, comfortable, easy to care for, and good for traveling. Sweaters, ever-popular garments in many families, may represent a major item in the total family clothing budget.

This publication is designed to help you select sweaters and other knit garments — such as dresses, suits, and shirts — that will best serve your needs and give maximum wear and satisfaction for the money you have to spend. You cannot depend on price to indicate quality. Knowledge of what influences quality is a better guide for a satisfactory purchase.

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After inspecting your wardrobe needs and deciding what type of knit garment you want, make your selection with the following factors in mind: type of fabric used, how the garment is made and how it fits, and type of care needed.

FABRIC FIBERS

Fiber content, yarn construction, type of knit, and fabric finish combine to give specific characteristics of texture and weight and care requirements to a knit fabric. In knits, as in all other fabrics, appearance and quality begin with the fiber.

The Textile Fiber Products Identification Act makes it mandatory for manufacturers to list the percentage (by weight) of each fiber in a fabric on a hang-tag or label. Fibers must be identified by their generic or group names. Natural fibers are listed generically by their original names—cotton, wool, silk, and linen. Synthetic fibers, such as nylon, acrylic, polyester, and acetate, have been generically classified according to similar chemical properties.

If you understand the properties of the various groups of fibers, you will be able to identify specific fibers more readily. And you will be able to more readily associate new fibers on the market with familiar ones.

Let's consider the characteristics of some of the natural and man-made fibers commonly used in sweaters and other knit garments. Natural fibers may be protein fibers, which come from animals, or cellulose (vegetable) fibers, which come from plants.

Animal Fibers

Wool is one of the most popular fibers for sweaters and other outer knitwear because of its resilience, hand (the way it feels), and warmth. It absorbs moisture, which adds to its comfort. Good-quality woolen knit garments are made from wool fabrics with a soft yet springy feel. They are not harsh or scratchy. Wool presents some care and cleaning problems because of its attraction for moths and its felting (matting) characteristics.
Cashmere (from the Kashmir goat) is a luxurious fiber that produces a soft, almost silky feel in a garment. Wool or synthetic fibers may be blended with it to add strength as well as to reduce cost. Usually the softer and silkier the fabric, the higher the quality of cashmere used. Cashmere presents care problems similar to wool, as do rabbit hair and mohair.

Rabbit hair (from the Angora rabbit), because of its high cost and relative lack of durability, is usually found blended with other fibers rather than by itself. It adds a pleasing richness of texture to a blend.

Mohair (from the Angora goat) is a smooth, wiry fiber that is very resilient and strong. Kid mohair, which is fine and lustrous, is usually used in sweaters. Coarser mohair from older animals may be found in fabrics used for other knit garments.

Wool is often blended with mohair for softer yarns. Nylon is also often used as a blending fiber. It lends dimensional stability (ability of a fabric to hold its original shape) and cuts fabric cost.

Silk is becoming more important in knit garments because of its suitable qualities. It is strong and very absorptive and has moderate elasticity.

Silk may be found alone or in blends with other natural fibers or with synthetic fibers. It can give a lustrous appearance and softer hand to the blend.

Vegetable Fibers

Cotton sweaters are cool, comfortable, and easy to launder. However, cotton does not have as much elasticity as wool and is not wrinkle resistant. Sweaters and other outer cotton knit garments may need reblocking occasionally, particularly if special finishes are not applied to the fabric to prevent stretching, shrinking, and wrinkling.

Cotton knit garments are becoming more popular as improved knitting and finishing techniques add to dimensional stability and textural variety.

Linen is becoming important in knit fabrics, especially for dresses and suits. It offers interesting texture possibilities and when blended with synthetics provides a fabric with good moisture absorption as well as good dimensional stability.
Man-made Fibers

Man-made or synthetic fibers (except rayon) are thermoplastic, which means that synthetic yarns or fabrics can be molded and set by heat into a variety of fabric textures. Fabrics made from these thermoplastic fibers have good shape retention and wrinkle recovery.

Knit blends of synthetic and natural fibers must contain at least 50 percent of a synthetic to give the fabric the synthetic's inherent qualities of dimensional stability and wrinkle recovery. Smaller percentages (10-20 percent) of the synthetic may be used in a blend to add color interest, abrasion resistance, or texture.

Knits made from synthetics wash easily and dry quickly because the fibers are not very absorbent. Most fabrics made of synthetic fibers are subject to static electricity. Some tend to pill easily. Pilling refers to the formation of little balls of fiber on the surface of the fabric as a result of friction.

*Nylon* may be found by itself in knits or in blends. It has excellent strength and when blended with natural fibers gives a fabric abrasion resistance.

*Acrylic fibers* (Orlon, Acrilan, Creslan, Zefran, and Zefkrome) are naturals for knit fabrics. They are warm and lightweight and have good strength, wet or dry. The fabrics have a softer, warmer hand than nylon and are usually more wrinkle resistant.

Acrylic fibers can be made into fabrics that resemble woolens. Acrylics, however, are much easier to care for than woolens.

Orlon Sayelle, a fabric that is a variation of Orlon, has a drier, rougher texture than other acrylic fibers. It is less likely to pill and become fuzzy after washing than regular Orlon.

*Polyester* fibers (Dacron, Kodel, Fortrel, and Vycron) have not been used as much as the acrylics in knit fabrics, but they are becoming more important. They are more apt to be found in knit dresses and suits than in sweaters. They have good strength and excellent wrinkle resistance, but do not feel as soft or as warm as acrylics.

*Acetate* knit fabrics have a silky feel and sheen. They will most often be found in textured, dressy knit garments. Acetate is not as strong as some of the other synthetic fibers and it has a low melting point. Press it carefully.
Triacetate (Arnel) is often used in jerseys for dresses and blouses. It can produce lightweight fabrics with fairly good body. Triacetate has a higher melting point than acetate and greater wrinkle resistance. It can be heat set into durable pleats as can the acrylic and polyester fibers.

YARNS

The way fibers are made into yarns (that is, the amount of twist applied during spinning) and the types of finishes used will affect the texture, feel, and strength of a fabric.

A yarn is a strand of fiber that is laid or twisted together. It may be constructed of short fibers called staples or of continuous filament fibers. Several strands may be twisted together to make a heavier, stronger yarn called a ply yarn.

A moderately twisted yarn is more durable than one that is loosely twisted. Very tight twisting may lessen softness and strength but gives greater resistance to pilling.

Novelty Yarns

Irregular and uneven yarns may be produced for special textural effects and can be used very effectively in knit fabrics. These include, among others, ratiné, bouclé, and slub yarns (Fig. 1).

Textured Yarns

Texturing man-made yarns has produced a variety of interesting surfaces in knit garments. Many textured yarns are made from continuous filament fibers which have been heat set into crimped, looped, or coiled shapes. These shapes produce bulky yarns.
Fig. 2 — Textured yarns.

Fabrics from textured yarns may be labeled with such brand names as Banlon, Helanca, Taslan, or Tycora (Fig. 2). The fabrics are less likely to pill because continuous filament fibers are used. However, some textured yarns, such as those used in some Orlon and nylon sweaters (with the exception of Orlon Sayelle), are made from staple fibers and tend to pill.

TYPES OF KNIT

Knit fabrics are made by interlocking one or more yarns in a series of loops. Many stitch patterns are possible by varying the ways loops are formed.

The tension (strain or pull on the yarns), compactness (closeness of yarns), and construction (type of stitch) of a knit influence the texture, weight, and durability of a fabric. A loose, open knit garment may not hold its shape as well as a more compact garment unless it has been heat set, specially finished, or fully lined.

Filling Knits

Filling (or weft) knits are constructed with the yarns running crosswise, thus producing a fabric with a certain amount of stretch or give. In any knit fabric the loops should appear round (Fig. 3, top), not elongated. Elongated loops (Fig. 3, bottom) indicate that the fabric was stretched and will probably shrink when washed or cleaned.

The term double knit is used for a type of filling knit fabric made with two yarns on a double set of needles that knit and interlock the two sides of the fabric. Both sides of the fabric look similar. A double knit is firmer and holds its shape better than a fabric made on one set of needles.
Warp Knits

Warp knits are constructed with the yarns running vertically (Fig 4.). This produces run-resistant fabrics that are less elastic than the filling knits. Tricot knits are constructed by the warp process.

FABRIC FINISHES

Cotton and wool knit fabrics may be finished to resist stretching or shrinking. Dylanized, Kroy, and Wurlanized are some of the trade names for finishes that stabilize woolens. Cotton knits may be finished by compressive shrinkage, a mechanical method for making a fabric more compact and stable. Pac-knit and Dura Fit are some trade names for this process, but some labels just state that the fabric is a stable knit.

Resin finishes for wrinkle resistance may also be applied to cotton knits and will also help to stabilize them. Their use is usually stated on the label.

Wool fabrics may be treated with a special moth-proof finish. Check the label to see if such a finish was applied and if the finish is guaranteed for the life of the garment, withstanding necessary washing and dry cleaning.
HOW GARMENTS ARE MADE

Construction methods and workmanship greatly affect the appearance and service of a knit garment.

Shaping

There are two basic types of construction used for shaping sweaters and other knit garments: full-fashioned and cut and sewn.

*Full-fashioned* garments are made from fabric that is shaped and bound off into garment pieces as the machine knits. Stitches are added or decreased to create the desired shape, and “fashion” marks, which appear as slightly larger stitches, can be seen at armholes, sleeves, and sides. The rows of knit stitches come together at an angle at the marks (Fig. 5).

Fake “fashion” marks are sometimes used on knit garments to imitate true full-fashioned construction. These garments are really cut and sewn. The fake marks are merely extra stitches of thread added after the fabric is knitted and during the construction of the garment. Examine the wrong side of the garment to determine whether separate
threads were used to fake full-fashioning. Knit rows will be parallel at the marks and not at an angle as will rows in full-fashioning (Fig. 5).

Synthetic fibers mold better than natural fibers and can be heat set into the desired shape. Thus full-fashioning is not as important in synthetics and often is not used.

Cut and sewn knit garments are made from pattern pieces cut from flat fabric, as are woven garments. This process is less expensive than full-fashioning, although not all cut and sewn garments are inexpensive. Cutting from flat fabric is used for most of the knit garments now on the market, including many of the sweaters.

Carefully inspect garments for cut of grain. Being on grain is just as important for the proper hang and shaping of knit garments as it is for woven garments. A garment that is not cut on true grain will probably not hang right, especially after being washed or dry cleaned.

Knit fabrics have a grain just as woven fabrics do. Although the yarns go in only one direction, vertical and horizontal grain directions become apparent in the looping process. The vertical grains are called wales and the horizontal courses. When the lines formed by the wales and courses are at right angles to each other on every part of the knit surface, the fabric is said to be on grain.

Garment pieces made by full-fashioning are always on grain because they are knit separately. Garment pieces cut from flat knit fabric, however, may not be on grain. There is always a chance that the pattern pieces will not be placed straight with the grain when a garment is made (Fig. 6) or that the fabric will be pulled or stretched off grain before cutting.

Seams and Joinings

Seams and joinings should be neat and closely stitched with no loose threads or yarns or bulkiness. They should be straight and even, not twisted or puckered.

Seams in full-fashioned garments are usually made by looping or intertwining yarn at the edges of the separate pieces so that the seams are not bulky and are less visible.

If seams of cut and sewn garments have very narrow seam allowances, they should be covered (overcast) with thread to keep the edges of the fabric from raveling. Wide seams may not require finishing or they may be handled with an appropriate finish as are seams for woven fabrics.
Fig. 6 — Garment piece at left is on grain; the piece at right is off grain.

Waist and sleeve bands in the best sweaters are made with continuous knitting with a changed stitch. On some garments the bands are knit separately and then attached by a hand-looping process that makes them look knit on. On less expensive garments bands are attached by seaming.

Seams subject to strain, or areas such as shoulder seams where stretching is undesirable, should be reinforced. This is usually done by taping.

Ribbing at the Neck, Waist, and Sleeves

Ribbing should be firm and should retain its shape after being stretched. Double ribbing, where the ribbing is knit twice the desired width of the band and then folded and stitched against itself, provides a stronger finish, or banding, than single ribbing.

In some better-grade garments elastic thread is included in the neck ribbing to help hold shape. Nylon may reinforce wool or cotton yarns in the ribbing areas. Its use is usually stated on the label.

Front or Back Openings

Check the edges of front or back openings to be sure they are on grain.
Ribbon reinforcement, which is sometimes used on sweaters and other knit garments, is neat and strong and is a good backing for buttons and buttonholes. If it is poor quality (sleazy looking), however, it may fade or shrink. Knit backing on front edges eliminates fading or shrinking out of shape in relation to the rest of the garment, but it may be bulky.

Dresses, suits, and coats made from knit fabrics, like similar garments from woven fabrics, should have firm interfacings appropriate for the fabric in buttonhole areas and in collars or at the neckline of collarless garments.

Buttonholes are often good indicators of garment quality. They should be cut straight with grain, evenly spaced, and the same distance from the garment edge. Buttonholes worked with thread should be made with firm stitching that is deep enough and close enough together to cover cut edges. Vertical buttonholes do not stay closed as well as horizontal ones. Ribbon or banding should be wide enough to take care of the full length of horizontal buttonholes.

Buttons and other trimmings should be able to withstand the care given the rest of the garment. Buttons should be smooth so they will not catch on buttonhole threads.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN SIZE AND FIT

Fit is just as important in knits as it is in woven garments. Knits take their form and shape from your figure. A garment that is too tight (or clingy) will not add to your appearance and may not wear well because yarns are under too much strain. It is usually best to buy sweaters a size larger than you normally wear in woven garments. A garment that is too large also detracts from appearance. It will not set well on your figure and may be uncomfortable.

Sizing is not uniform among garment manufacturers. Some companies mark sweaters in sizes corresponding to dress or suit sizes while others size according to bust or chest measurements. To be sure of a good fit always try a garment on before buying it. Even garments with the same size markings may vary in chest or hip measurements and in sleeve lengths. This is especially true of imported knits.

Check the garment to see that it fits through the body with slight fullness and no cupping or strain and that armholes are comfortable. Front or back openings should stay neatly closed and the lower edge of the garment should be even.
CARING FOR KNIT GARMENTS

In selecting a sweater or other knit garment consider the type of care it needs to retain its original appearance and to give you maximum service. Always consult the labels for any care instructions. You will want a garment that requires the type of care you can give it.

Save the labels from the garments you buy and follow the directions carefully. If a garment is labeled “washable,” you may expect ribbon, thread, buttons, and any trimmings, as well as the garment fabric, to be washable unless otherwise stated. If a garment is labeled “dry clean” and washing is not mentioned, dry clean only.

Care in wearing and storing knit garments also helps them stay nice longer. All knits give better service if allowed to “rest” at least 24 hours between wearings. Yarns relax and garments retain their original shape better.

Most knit garments should be folded loosely and stored in un-crowded drawers. Hanging may cause some knit garments, particularly woolens, to stretch. Firm double knits or lined garments, however, may be hung on hangers.

Severe pilling on synthetic garments may be removed with a safety razor or commercial “depilling” instrument. Pulling the pills off by hand injures the fabric. Place the garment on a smooth surface such as a pillow and run the razor over the pilled area with an easy motion. Let the weight of the razor do the work. Don’t press down on it.

Washing Specific Types of Fabrics

Washing, when fabric and garment allow, is usually more effective than dry cleaning, particularly for removing perspiration. Pretreating especially soiled areas such as necklines and grease spots with soap or detergent insures a more thoroughly cleaned garment and shortens washing time.

Avoid excessive rubbing. Turn the garment inside out before washing to insure a smoother finish to the right side. A fabric softener in the last rinse helps prevent static electricity and restore a soft hand to the fabric.

Wool. Before washing a garment, trace its shape on paper so you will have a pattern to help you reblock it for drying.

In general, to reduce shrinkage wool should be washed in a short period of time with the least amount of handling or rubbing possible.
Use water that is comfortably warm to the hands (110°-120°), because it cleans faster and more thoroughly than cool or cold water.

Strong alkaline solutions weaken wool fabrics, so avoid using strong soaps. All-purpose laundry detergents are a good choice for wool garments. Their alkalinity is similar to that of mild soaps and they clean faster and better with little or no rubbing.

Do not use chlorine bleach on wool because it turns it yellow.

Soak the garment for five to seven minutes. Then turn it over without taking it out of the water and let it soak a few minutes more. If the garment is heavily soiled, gently squeeze the suds through the fabric.

Drain the soiled water from the garment and gently squeeze — don’t twist — the suds out.

Rinse the garment repeatedly until the rinse water is clear. Use the same water temperature that was used for washing. Changing water temperature from wash to rinse may cause shrinkage.

Lift the garment out of the water by placing your hands underneath it. Don’t grasp it from the top and drag it out.

Loosely roll the wet garment in a Turkish towel to remove excess water. Pat and block it gently to its original size and shape as you had traced them. For a snug fit, tightly squeeze the neckband and cuffs and let them dry that way.

Dry the garment away from heat or sunlight. Heat shrinks wool and sunlight turns white wools yellow and may discolor others.

Careful touch-up with a steam iron is optional.

Woolens may be washed in an automatic washer if washer directions are followed carefully.

Cotton and linen knits can be washed very successfully, especially if they have a shrinkage-control finish. The general washing directions for wool also apply to cotton and linen knits, except that stronger soap and hotter water may be used.

Synthetics. The washing instructions for cotton apply to most synthetic garments, except synthetics may be hung to dry on well-shaped, plastic hangers. They may also be dried flat or by folding a clean bath towel in thirds lengthwise, slipping it through the sleeves, and pinning the ends to a clothesline.

Orlon Sayelle, however, tends to stretch when wet and should not be hung to dry. Garments will block themselves if bunched up on a
smooth surface to dry. They may also be dried in an automatic dryer. In fact, if Orlon Sayelle garments are washed in an automatic washer, they should be dried in a dryer for the best self-blocking results.

**POINTS TO REMEMBER**

No one characteristic of a sweater or other knit garment controls its entire performance and appearance. The satisfaction and value you receive from any knit garment are influenced by:

- **Fabric** that has the appearance and durability characteristics you want.
- **Construction** methods suited to the type of garment.
- **Fit** that is comfortable and attractive.
- **Care** requirements that are consistent with the type of care you can give it.

Examine the garment carefully. Read the labels for any information that may be given on fibers, finishes, and care.
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