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How often do I change a sewing needle?

The sewing machine needle is one of the main parts of the sewing machine, without one it simply will not work. Sewing machine needles do become blunt fairly quickly and need to be changed regularly. Changing the needle is a very easy task as it is always kept in place by a screw, simply undo the screw to remove the needle which should easily come out. The needle always needs to be reattached in a certain way, with domestic machines the needle has a flat shank on one side and can be inserted with ease. The industrial sewing machine has a rounded shank but again it is inserted very easily. If the needle is inserted wrongly and the groove of the needle that feeds the thread is facing the wrong way, the stitches will distort and cause problems. As the domestic machine has a flat shank, this should never happen.

Reasons to change a needle:

1. The needle is damaged, bent, burred or broken.
2. The needle is dull or blunt and makes a popping sound when you are stitching.
3. The thread breaks easily during stitching (it could also be that the needle has been inserted the wrong way round).
4. The machine is skip stitching.
5. A different thread size is required (for decorative top-stitching for example).
6. A different fabric is sewn with a different weight, thickness and construction.

How to change a sewing machine needle:

Turn the power off to the machine and make sure that the needle is in the highest position, you can do this by turning the fly wheel manually at the side of the machine.

Turn the small screw that is holding the needle in place, most domestic machines does not need the use of a screw driver. Remove the needle from the needle bar, if the needle has shattered make sure you remove all the broken parts. Dispose of the needle safely.

Check the new needle for straightness by rolling it on the machine table. If the needle is straight, the blade of the needle will remain parallel to the table surface when it is rolled. Check the needle point for burrs by running your fingertip over the point.

To check the needle and thread compatibility, thread the needle with a short length of thread. Hold the thread taught at each end in a vertical position. The needle should spin slowly down and around the thread. If it slides to quickly or does not slide at all, try a different size needle or select another thread.

Insert the needle with the flat shank fitting into the housing of machine, it should just slide up with no problems at all. Once the needle can not go up any further tighten the screw to hold the needle in place. This is always located by the side of the needle housing on the sewing machine.

If you have any problems consult your instruction booklet that came with the machine as all needle housing parts can differ.

Sewing machine needles are relatively cheap and its always a good idea to have a box of them spare as needles do break quite frequently. It is always useful to have a good selection of needles in terms of size and also needle type.

Types of needle:

Round point used for knitted materials.

Ball point used for knits and stretch fabrics.

Leather point used for leather, suede and neoprene. The leather point has a built in knife on the needle.

Standard needles are used for most every day sewing projects and range from 70 up to 110 in size

Standard needle 110 is ideal for heavy twill fabrics and denim.

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