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## **Is it okay to start sewing straight on to your fabric or do I need to perform a shrinkage test first?**

With there being literary thousands of fabrics to choose from, the first thought that most sewers get is do I need to perform a shrinkage test to my fabric before I can use it?, well the answer is no as most fabrics come pre treated and can be used from the off. The only time that a shrinkage test would be performed is when you have bought a really expensive cloth and you do not want to risk making the garment, only to find out that it has shrunk after you have washed it.

There are four main natural fabrics that you will come across and these consist of wool, linen, cotton and silk. The rest are man-made of which include acrylic, viscose, polyester and many others. Fabrics with a mix of natural fibres and man-made fibres, generally can be washed without to much concern.

Cotton fabrics are one of the most popular fabrics available and has been used as a fabric for making clothes for many centuries. It is a natural material made by twisting together the long fibrous hairs that cover the seed pods of the cotton plant. Theses fibres vary in length and in thickness and have an absorbent quality, making cotton both soft and comfortable to wear. The longest, finest and most lustrous fibres make the best quality cottons, such as Sea Island and Egyptian. Cotton varies greatly in weight and quality ranging from lightweight, loosely woven sheers to heavy napped fabrics such as velvet. Other fibres such as silk are often blended with cotton to produce durable mixed fibre fabrics. Many easy care, crease resistant fabrics are blends of cotton and synthetic fibres. Cotton fabrics are widely used for dressmaking as well as for bed linen, upholstery and other soft furnishings.

Wool is a natural animal fibre spun from the fleece of sheep. The finest wools are made of short fibres with the longer fibres producing a coarser fabric. There are several types of speciality wool. These include mohair, angora and cashmere, spun from the hair of particular breeds of goat and alpaca which is produced from the hairs of alpaca, a close relative of the llama. Speciality wools are very soft and tend to be expensive since they are produced in relatively quantities. They are often mixed with sheep's wool to add lustre and to improve the drape of a fabric. Wool is a versatile fabric and is available in several different weights, textures and weaves, plain and twill weave being the most common. It is comfortable to wear and absorbs moisture well. It is also flame resistant, water repellent and elastic. Wool is usually easy to clean but it can be permanently damaged by sunlight, moths, bleach and incorrect pressing.

Linen and silk are both derived from natural fibres and are traditionally associated with high quality luxury fabrics, although today they are becoming much more competitive in price. Linen is produced from the fibres of the flax plant, while silk is woven from the silken threads that are spun by the silk worm. Both these fabrics are available in a variety of weights and qualities and can be woven together to produce linen and silk mixes. Linen is cool and lightly absorbent, making it a particular comfortable fabric to wear in hot climates. It takes colour well but may crease easily so it is often mixed with other fibres such as cotton to increase crease resistance. Silk is available as a mix or in its pure form in which it is woven in varying weights.

Fabrics made from fibres that are not grown naturally fall into two categories, synthetic and rayon. Synthetic fibres such as polyester, nylon, acrylic and elastane are produced chemically from combinations of gas, petroleum, alcohol, water and air. Rayons such as viscose and acetate are made from plant cellulose, which is regenerated to form fibres. Like the fabrics formed from natural fibres, most rayons are absorbent and comfortable to wear but they crease easily and tend to shrink and ravel. Synthetic fibres are durable, hardwearing and crease resistant but they are not absorbent. Special fabrics include unusual and experimental textiles, as well as fabrics such as leather and suede which require special sewing techniques.

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