

Working with Fold-over Elastic

11.221

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SEW-lutions Guidelines

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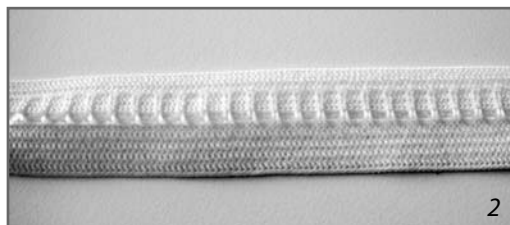
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You have probably noticed it in ready-to-wear as an edge finish, or perhaps you've seen it in the fabric store and didn't know exactly what it was or what to do with it. We're talking about fold-over elastic.



It can take on more than one persona—some is flat with an indentation down the center (1); other elastic has small loops down the middle when viewed flat (2), but when folded those loops create a picot edge like you find on T-shirt or lingerie edges (3). Depending on the elastic construction, one side may have a more satiny appearance (right side) and the underside a more matte look.



On the Edge

Fold-over elastic makes a fast and easy edge finish for many types of garments. Used like flat or bias binding, but knitted and stretchable, there are no worries about going around curves, puckering or fraying. The narrow version of the elastic is about 5/8" wide, depending on the brand, so it will produce a bound edge a generous 1/4" wide with a fabric layer inside. There's also a 1" version, which folds to finish 1/2". The wider elastic is often used on diapers to finish the edges.

Preparation

Like any binding, you'll need to remove the seam allowance on the edges the elastic will cover. On knits or fabrics that fray, first sew a line of staystitching a hair wider than the seam allowances you're trimming. For example, on edges with a 5/8" seam allowance, stitch at the 3/4" mark.

Carefully trim off the seam allowance right next to the stitching. Be careful not to stretch the cut edges.

Most fold-over elastic can be pressed on a synthetic setting, but always test to be sure you don't damage it.

Fold the elastic to mimic bias tape, with the underside just slightly longer than the upper portion (4). Extending the lower lip assures that you'll catch it in the stitching, even with the thickness of fabric between.



If the elastic is going on a curved edge, you can pre-shape it while you press.

If you're binding an armhole or neckline edge and you can leave the side or shoulder seam open until the binding is completed, you'll be able to hide the elastic ends in the seam for a neat finish. If it's a waistline, leave open one side seam a small amount to tuck the ends. If that's not possible, use another finish at the beginning/end (see below).

Pin the elastic over the garment edge with the extended side to the underside. If the ends won't be caught in a seam, leave 1" for finishing.

On most edges, don't stretch the elastic as you pin, simply apply it flat. The exception would be on a loose knit where you might need to "pull in" the neckline a bit for a better fit. Pulling the elastic too snugly can result in puckers.

If you're binding leg openings, like on cloth diapers and lingerie, stretch the elastic as you apply it so it will hug the leg.

Stitching

Test-stitch a sample on a scrap of your garment fabric before sewing the real thing.

Use a small zigzag stitch to apply the elastic on knits, or a straight stitch on wovens. Using a small zigzag allows the bound edge some flexibility akin to the amount of stretch in a knit fabric. For example, you can still pull a T-shirt over your head without popping stitches.

Wider elastic is sometimes applied with a three-step zigzag stitch spanning the edge.

You can also apply fold-over elastic using a decorative stitch. Choose a stitch that is open (not dense) and is formed only with a forward motion. Using a dense stitch will damage the elastic fibers.

Begin stitching about 1/2" from the original end of the elastic. If the elastic has a tendency to scoot as you sew, use a dual-feed or walking foot for this application.

If your project has corners, either round them slightly for easier application or miter the corners of the elastic as you would for a double quilt binding. Use the tip of a pin to manipulate the elastic fold at the corner.

Finishing

To finish the ends of the elastic if they're not enclosed in a seam, simply clip the elastic about 1/2" longer than the origination point and overlap the ends. Then turn and stitch across the elastic width to secure it.

Alternate Application

Instead of binding the fabric edge in one step, it's also possible to apply the elastic using a two-step process. To choose this option, pin only the underside of the elastic in place (following the same principles as above) and straight stitch it place. Then fold the upper layer over the edge and zigzag it in place.

This method is sometimes easier if you have a "squirrely" fabric to deal with as each side is anchored independently. 🐿️

For more information on binding, see Guideline 6.186 Using Bias tape, as many of the same principles apply to fold-over elastic.