

## No More Gaping Necklines or Armscyes on Knit Tops

**W**e all love the practicality and comfort of knit tops: T-shirts, sweatshirts, tank tops and fashionable shells.

They can be dressed up for evening wear or dressed down for casual wear. They're great for travel because they don't wrinkle and can be washed and worn without pressing. An added bonus is that they are quick and easy to make.

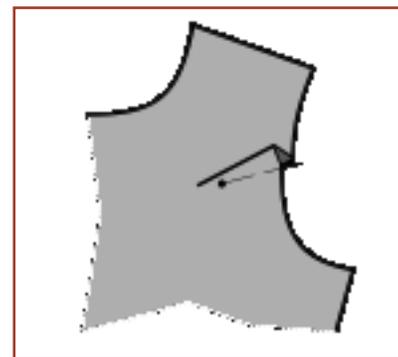
**Facing a Problem**—Easy, yes, but there is a problem that we need to deal with. Knits are popular because they stretch, but this advantage becomes a disadvantage at construction time. When curved edges are serged, the opening grows a bit. When the edge is turned under and stitched again on the sewing machine to hem, it grows even more. Then we put the garment on and the neckline gaps away from the body. This is especially true with the new slinky knits.

The problem is even worse on the armscyes of sleeveless tops. If you are bigger than a C-cup, a bust dart is necessary to prevent gaping in the front. If you have a rounded back, a shoulder dart is necessary to prevent gaping in the back. But no one wants to put a dart in a tank top.

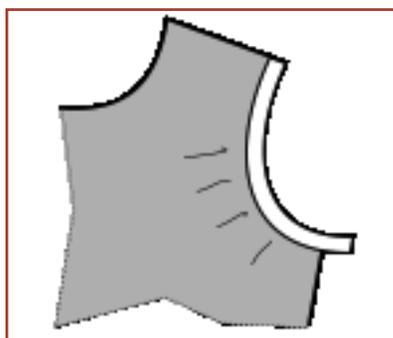
**The Solution**—These problems can be solved by stabilizing the edges, and when necessary, holding in excess fabric.

An easy way to do this is to use a bias fusible stabilizing tape from Japan. Since it is fusible, it is easy to apply. This tape is so fine that it adds no extra bulk when enclosed in the hem. You'll find the tape available at [www.uniquetechniques.com](http://www.uniquetechniques.com).

**Check for Gaping**—Stitch or serge the shoulder seams and baste the side seams. (Pin basting is the easiest way to baste.) Try on the garment.



**Figure 1**



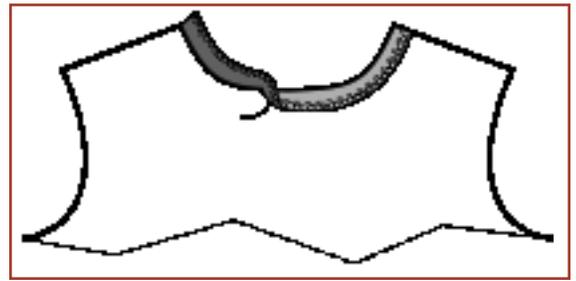
**Figure 2**

Pinch out any excess fabric in the neckline and armscye and pin it (like a little dart). See Figure 1.

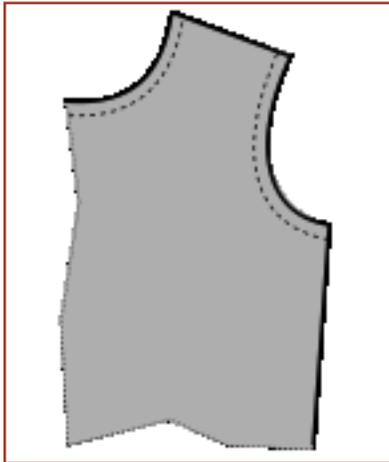
**Why It Grows**—Usually the neckline fits snugly. It is the serging and stitching that makes the neckline grow. For most people, the armscye on a sleeveless garment will gap away from the body, sometimes in the front, sometimes in the back, and sometimes in both places.

Take the garment off and measure the little darts to show how much the neckline or armscye must be shortened in order to fit snugly. Remove the pins and place the garment on the ironing board, where you have complete control. Put the stabilizing tape evenly (one-to-one ratio) next to the edge of the neckline or armscye. Shorten the tape by the amount of the dart. Pin the tape at each seam, and distribute the excess ease with your fingers. (See Figure 2).

Whatever was pinched out in the front of the armscye must be eased in at the front. Whatever was pinched out in the back, must be eased in at the back. The knit fabric can be easily “squoshed” to match the tape. Do not stretch the tape, as the edge will then end up the original length. Press the tape in position, just as with fusible interfacing. The excess fabric shrinks to the tape like magic.



**Figure 3**



**Figure 4**

**Finishing**—Machine stitch

or serge the side seams. Serge the edges of the neckline and armscye. This step is optional, since knits don’t ravel. Press well. I find it best to work from the wrong side and press over a tailor’s ham. Turn the edge under 1/4 to 3/8 of an inch, and press again. See Figures 3 and 4. Note: if you have a serger with cover stitch capability, both of these steps are performed in one operation.

If you like the look of a cover stitch but don’t have this capability, a ready-to-wear look can be achieved by top stitching the hems using a double needle in the sewing machine. Schmetz double needle size 4.0/75 is the perfect size, plus it’s a stretch needle, which prevents skipped stitches on knits.

**A Lesson About Double Needles**—There are always two numbers to designate size. The first number shows the distance between the two needles. The second number, the one that follows the slash, is the size of the needle. For example, for finer fabric a size 2.0/80 would be used. For heavier woven fabric, a size 6.0/100 could be used.

**Bonus!**—Design your own neckline. Cut the neckline a bit higher, but still large enough to get it over your head. Sew shoulders and side seams and put it on. Place a chain or cord where you want the neckline to fall. Mark this line, and add 3/8 of an inch for a narrow hem, cut and follow the above directions.

You can redesign necklines and remove worn bindings and ribbings using the same method. Existing garments with gaping necklines and armscyees can be corrected by deploying the stabilizing tape in the same way.

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