

Stay Tape *Know-how*

Stabilize knits where they need it most

BY PAMELA LEGGETT

I design patterns for knits and frequently sew knit garments. After much experimentation, I've settled on some simple methods that yield stable, professional-looking seams, necklines, and hems. You can solve the problem of knit necklines that gape or do not lie smoothly by applying the proper stay tape.

You may not have had ideal results with stay tapes in the past. This could be because you haven't found the right stay tapes to match your fabric. Many of the knit fabrics we sew with today are thinner and more drapey than knits used to be. They require stay tapes that are fine and lightweight.

Contemporary knits also frequently have four-way stretch. In a shoulder seam, the fabric tends to stretch crosswise as well as lengthwise. Without stay tape, you may discover that all of a sudden the shoulder seam is drooping or sliding down your arm.

Closures in knits, such as zippers, also benefit from the support offered by strategically placed stay tape. A strip of fusible interfacing can make the zipper installation, even in tissue knits, look smooth. Read on to see some of the ways I apply stay tapes in garment construction. These methods are straightforward and fast, but they are almost never included in commercial pattern instructions. Start adding stay tapes to your sewing toolkit for topnotch results with knits.

Pamela Leggett creates Pamela's Patterns and teaches sewing and fitting across the country and at her Vernon, Connecticut, studio. PamelasPatterns.com





Achieve stable, ripple-free results with a soft knit by applying stay tape.

Pattern: Pamela's Patterns 104 The Perfect T-Shirt. Fabric: wool-blend sweater knit.

Must-have types

After trying many stay tapes, I recommend the SewKeysE brand (PamelasPatterns.com or EmmaSeaBrooke.com). With these four, you can stabilize a variety of knits for most purposes.

1/2-inch-wide fusible woven stay tape:

This stay tape is cut on the straight or cross-grain and is stable. It is thin and has a little give, but it is not meant to go around curved edges. A twill tape or nylon tape alternative is bulky in a seam; this type is thin but stable.



1/2-inch-wide fusible knit stay tape:

This lightweight, stretchy stay tape conforms to curves at necklines and armholes and does not change the hand of drapery knits.



1-inch-wide double-sided fusible stay tape:

Apply this to fuse hem allowances in place and prepare a smooth, stable edge that's a breeze to sew without ripples.



1 1/4-inch-wide fusible knit stay tape/interfacing:

Fuse this knit interfacing to stabilize select garment edges in preparation for installing a zipper, for example.



insider extra

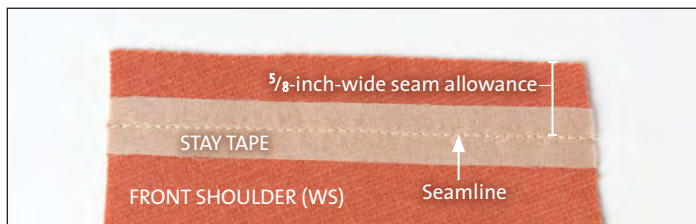
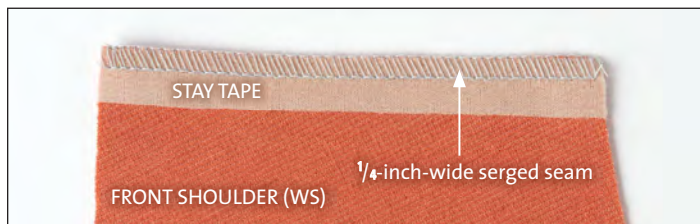
See the author apply stay tapes in a video at [ThreadsMagazine.com](https://www.threadsmagazine.com).

Shoulder seam stabilization

Place 1/2-inch-wide fusible woven stay tape along the front shoulder seamlines. The stabilized front then stabilizes the back. If you serge or otherwise finish the seam allowances together, you can press them to the back with the stabilizer flat, not folded.

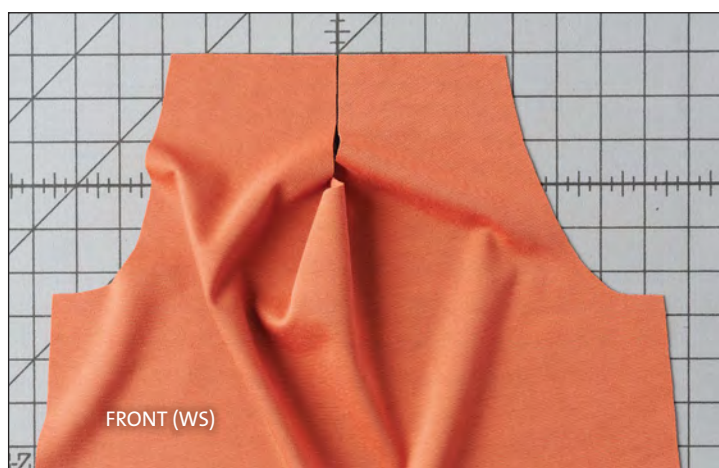
STAY TAPE PLACEMENT

The shoulder seam must go through the stay tape. If you are serging or sewing a pattern with 1/4-inch-wide seam allowances, align 1/2-inch-wide stay tape to the garment piece's edge to be caught in the stitching. If the pattern has a 5/8-inch-wide seam allowance, place the 1/2-inch-wide stay tape in from the garment edge, so the seam passes through the stay tape.



SPEEDY APPLICATION

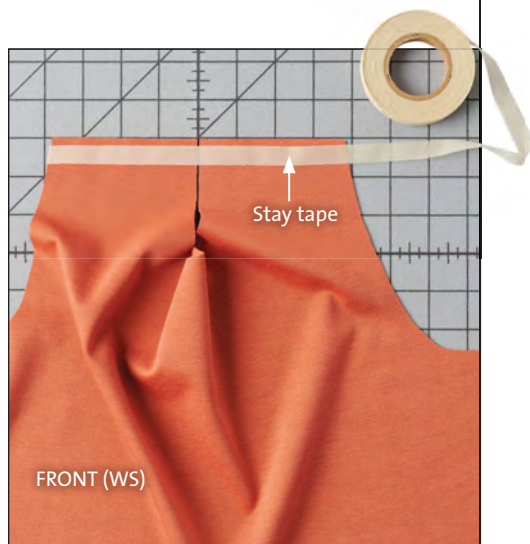
1 Arrange the front shoulders. With the garment front wrong side up, abut and align the shoulder edges straight across.



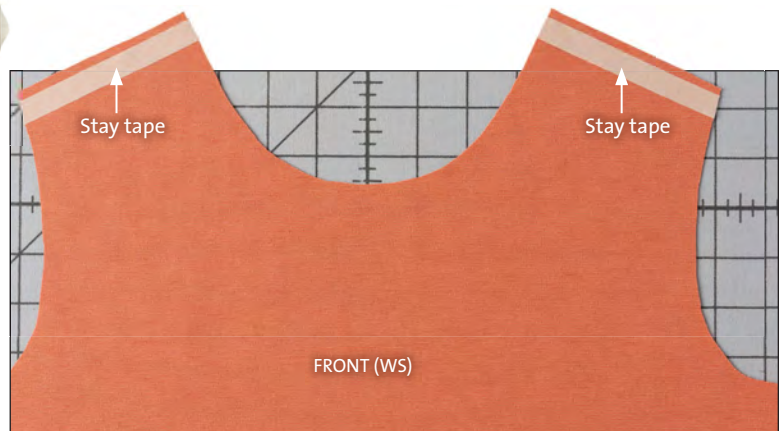
3 Place a press cloth over the work. Set the iron for steam, and at the highest heat the fabric tolerates. Steam the tape and give it 5 to 10 seconds to fuse. It's important to use a press cloth to protect the fabric from heat damage, as well as catch any adhesive that might seep through the thin stay tape.



2 Place a length of 1/2-inch-wide woven stay tape, fusible side down, along both shoulders. Place it inside the fabric edge, depending on the width of the seam allowance.



4 Let the work cool. Trim the stay tape, then snip it to separate the shoulders. Both seams have been stabilized.



Two neckline finishes

Stay tape adds stability to necklines, ensuring they do not ripple or gape. The 1/2-inch-wide fusible knit stay tape shown is lightweight and conforms to curves. It also has thermal memory, meaning that applying heat causes it to shrink back to shape after stitching.

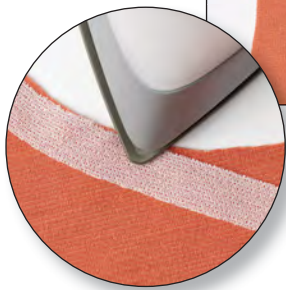
FRENCH TRIM FINISH

1 Cut a trim strip. Make it 2 1/2 inches wide and 1 1/2 inches shorter than the neckline circumference. The French trim finish should not be more than 1/2-inch wide when complete. The strip is sufficient for that finished width or a narrower trim if you prefer.

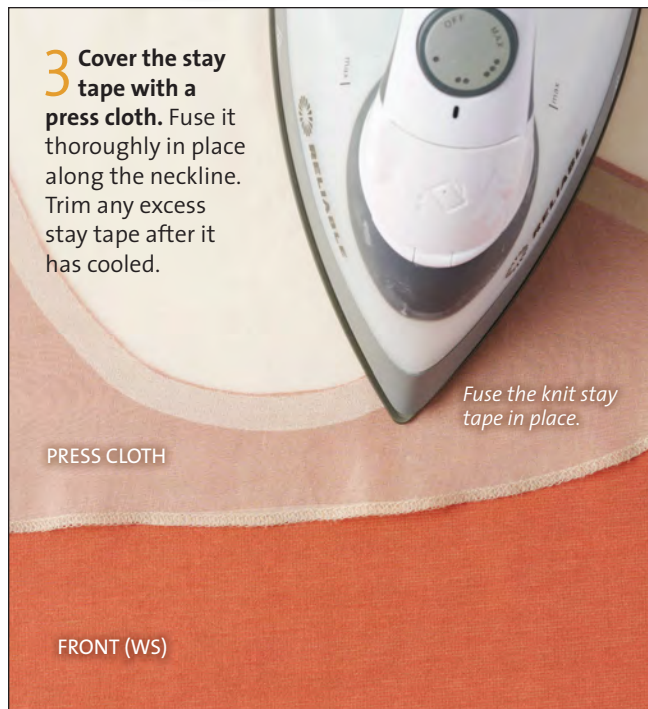
2 Place the garment wrong side up. Align 1/2-inch-wide knit stay tape, fusible side down, along the neckline edge. Use the iron tip to “baste” the stay tape in place.



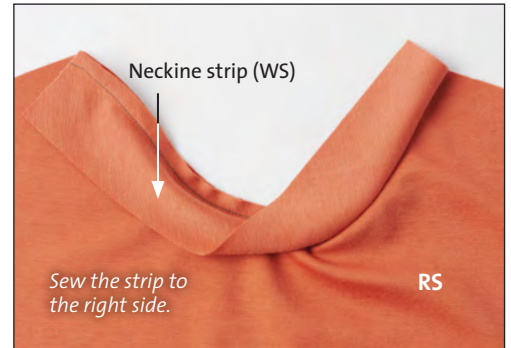
Tap the hot iron tip along the fusible stay tape to affix it along the neckline.



3 Cover the stay tape with a press cloth. Fuse it thoroughly in place along the neckline. Trim any excess stay tape after it has cooled.

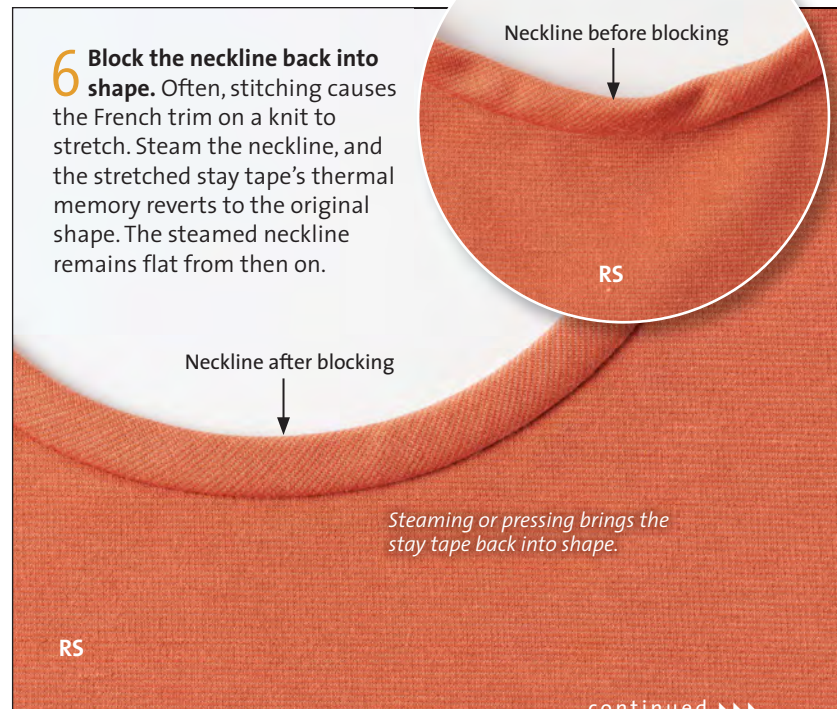


4 Align the strip to the neckline edge, right sides together. Stitch the strip to the neckline with a seam allowance slightly greater than the stay-tape width, in this case 1/2 inch.



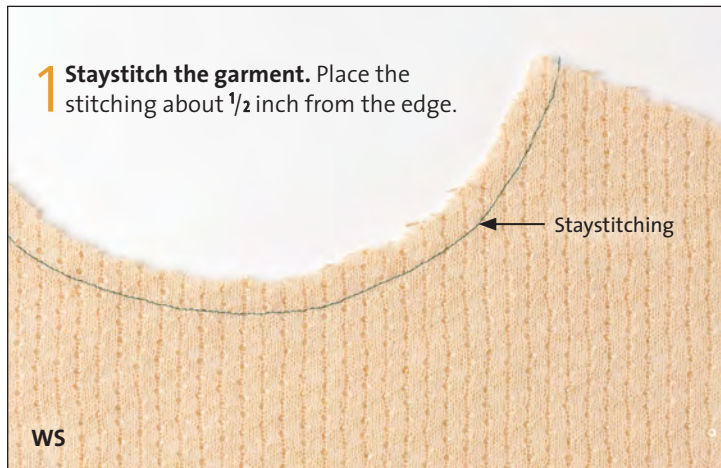
5 Wrap the trim over the neckline seam allowance to the wrong side. From the right side, stitch in the ditch with a straight stitch that is 3.0 mm or 3.5 mm long. Be sure to fold the strip evenly and catch it in the stitching on the wrong side. After stitching, trim the strip.

6 Block the neckline back into shape. Often, stitching causes the French trim on a knit to stretch. Steam the neckline, and the stretched stay tape's thermal memory reverts to the original shape. The steamed neckline remains flat from then on.

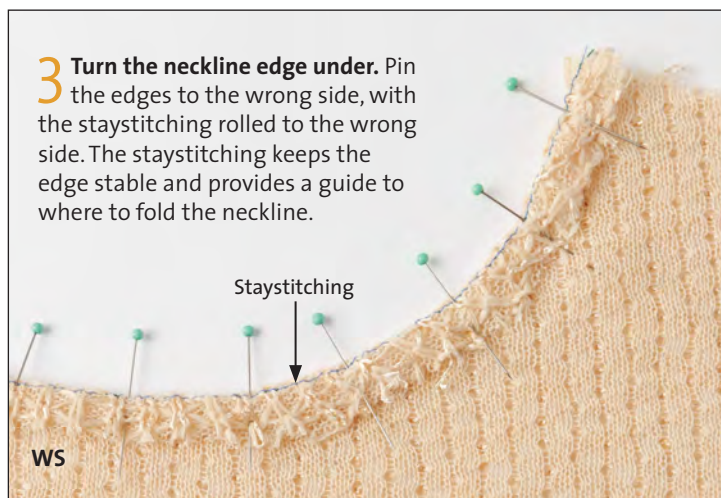
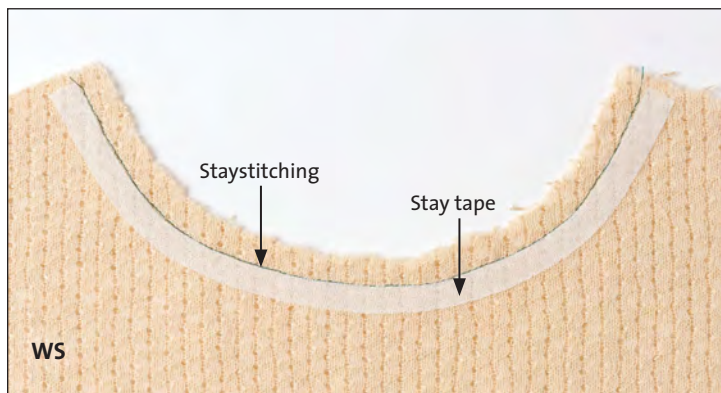


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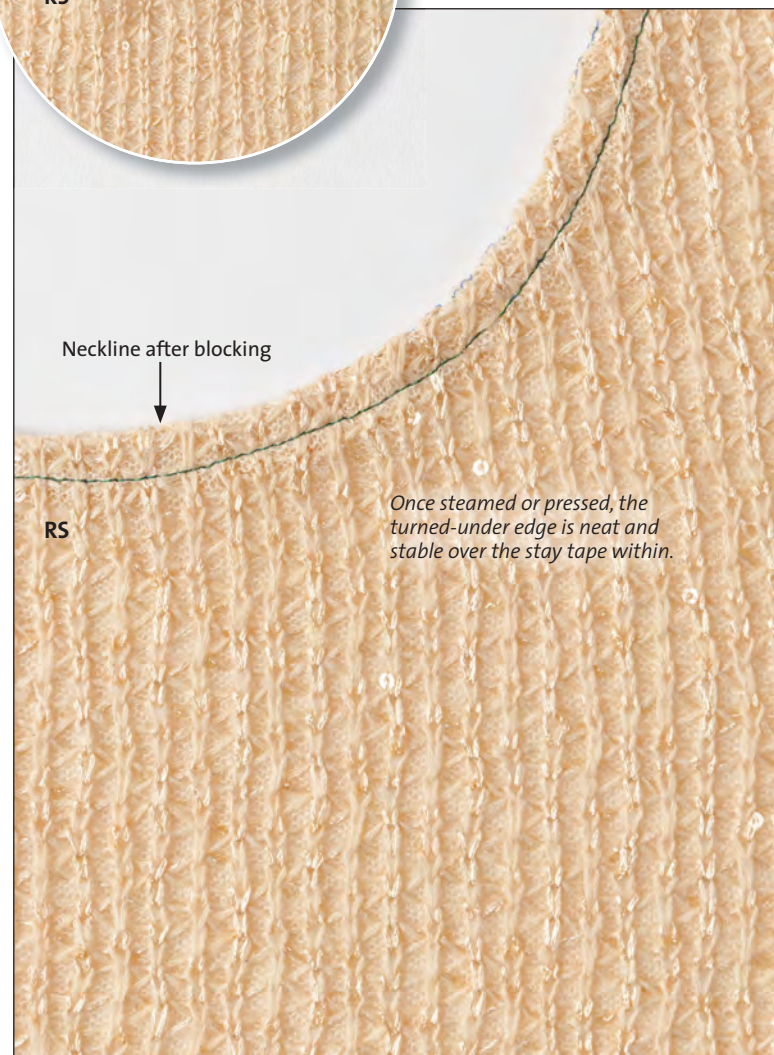
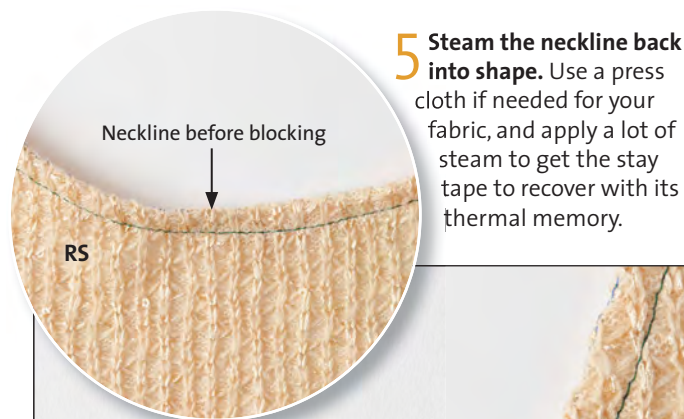
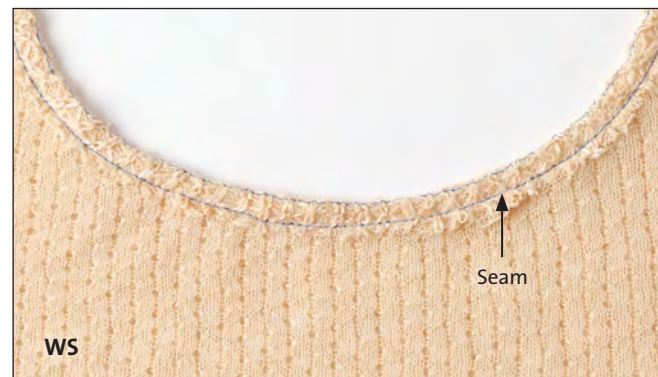
TURNED-UNDER EDGE



2 Apply 1/2-inch-wide knit stay tape, fusible side down, to the garment piece, wrong side up. Align the stay tape next to the staystitching, rather than the garment's edge. If you applied the stay tape up to the cut edge, it would limit the stretch of the fabric's edge. When placed within the garment, the stay tape stabilizes the area to be stitched and leaves the edge free to stretch. Fuse the stay tape in place.



4 Stitch to secure the neckline. Use a straight stitch with a 3.0 mm or 3.5 mm length. Stitch within the stay tape's width. The straight stitch has less give than a zigzag stitch and, therefore, stabilizes the neckline or armholes better.

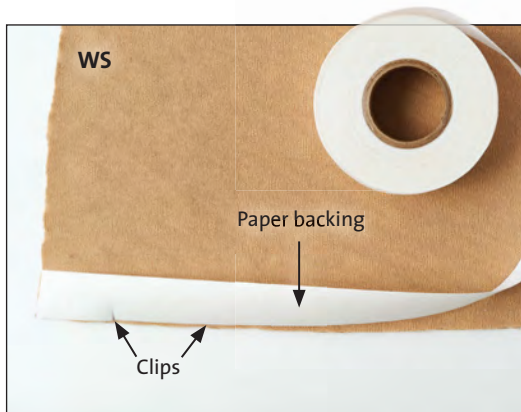


Two hemming methods

The essential stay tape for hemming knits is a lightweight, double-sided fusible adhesive product with a paper backing. Do not use it on stretch lace or fabrics with open areas because the adhesive could seep through. It is available in different widths; the 1-inch-wide variety is a good choice to hem most knit garments.

TOPSTITCHED HEM

1 Prepare the hem allowance. Adjust it to 1 inch wide. Then clip the stay tape to fit the hem curve. Most hemlines are slightly curved even when they look straight. With the garment's wrong side up, place the stay tape, fusible side down, just within the fabric's cut edge. Apply 5 seconds of heat and steam to the strip to melt the adhesive.



2 While the paper backing is still on the stay tape, make the hemline crease. The paper makes it easy to fold up the hem allowance at an even depth, no measuring required. Press the crease and allow the fabric and paper to cool. Peel the backing off the adhesive.



3 Fuse the hem allowance up along the established crease. With a curved hemline, a few small folds may form in the allowance, but they should be minimal. Use a press cloth and apply steam to melt all the adhesive.

A smooth hem is a breeze to sew with help from double-sided fusible stay tape.

*Pattern: Pamela's Patterns 115 Softly Pleated Dress.
Fabric: rayon/polyester jersey.*

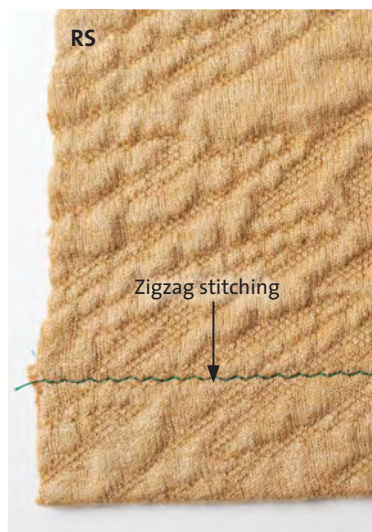
tip

Stretch the fabric to release the paper backing. If you have trouble separating the backing from the adhesive, pull the fabric slightly near one end of the strip. The paper separates from the adhesive, and you can start peeling it off from there.



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4 Stitch the hem to secure. On the sewing machine, use a narrow zigzag with a 1.0 mm width and 2.5 mm length so the hem has a little give. You can alternatively use a cover stitch, which has plenty of stretch, covers the hem allowance edge within the garment, and utilizes differential feed so the hem is not stretched out. Another option is twin-needle stitching, although I have found it tends to pop.

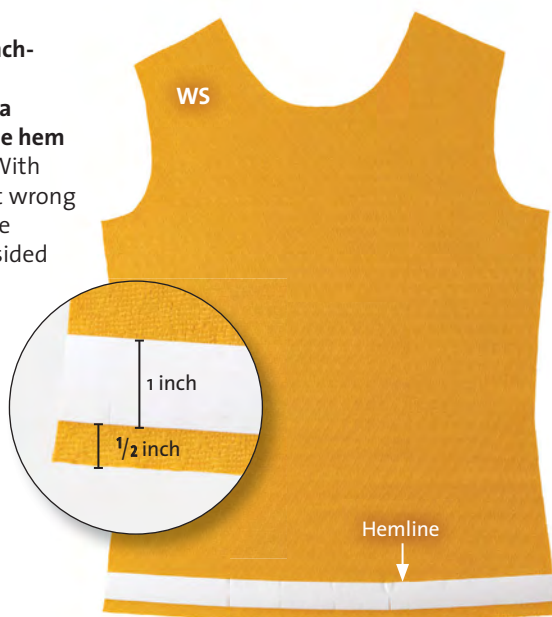


5 Steam or block the hem into shape. If you stitch the hem with a sewing machine, it's likely that it stretched. The double-sided fusible stay tape has thermal memory; heat will bring it back into shape. Hover the iron over the hem, then steam and press out any waves.

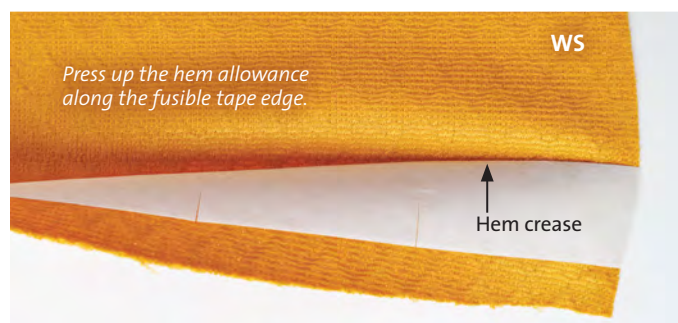


BLIND HEM

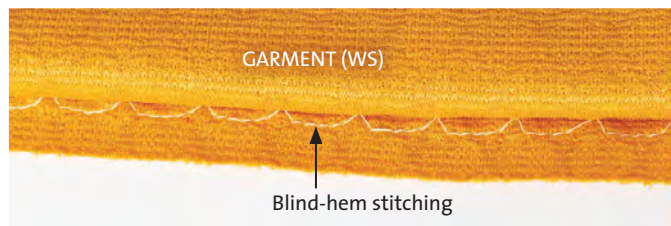
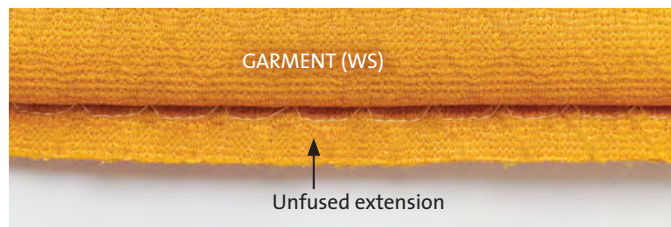
1 Apply 1-inch-wide stay tape within a 1½-inch-wide hem allowance. With the garment wrong side up, place the double-sided fusible stay tape ½ inch away from the hem's cut edge.



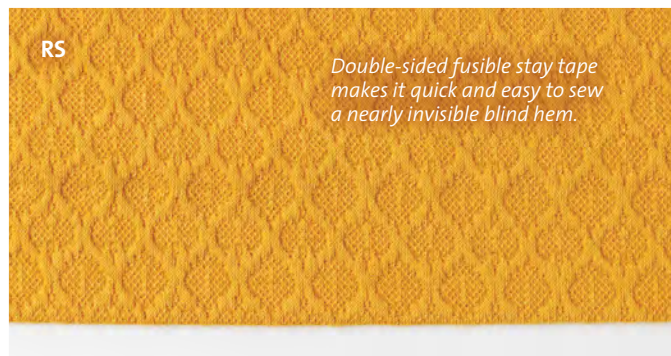
2 Set the hem crease. Without removing the stay tape's paper backing, fold up the hem allowance along its upper edge and press to crease. Let it cool, then remove the paper backing.



3 Press the hem, fusing it in place. Then turn back the hem allowance to stitch the blind hem on the ½-inch-wide unfused extension of the hem allowance. The stitches go into the hem allowance edge and periodically catch the garment with the zigzag.



4 Steam the blind hem to finish. From the right side, it is almost invisible. Once it's blocked it's all set.



Zipper support

Most of us have a ready-to-wear garment with a ripply zipper. The solution is knit stay-tape interfacing. This a lightweight interfacing product cut to a convenient width. My choice is 1¼ inches wide to support zippers. You can purchase it precut or cut strips of lightweight weft insertion interfacing.

Fuse this in a strip along the wrong side of the zipper opening edges in knit garments. The interfacing stabilizes the edges, and that keeps the zipper smooth. It really makes a difference.

I don't mind the strip of interfacing showing within the garment, but if you don't want much to show, you can cut it to a narrower width.



Fuse the interfacing strips to the edges to prepare for the zipper installation.

A zipper runs smoothly through a lightweight knit garment, supported by interfacing.

*Pattern: Pamela's Patterns 104 The Perfect T-Shirt, modified.
Fabric: wool-blend jersey.*



Knit stay tape interfacing