



Taming Serger Tensions

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For many, adjusting serger tensions causes just that: tension. Unlike conventional sewing machines, sergers may require fine-tuning of tensions with just about any change of fabric or thread. Take heart--the adjustments are logical and easy, and far fewer when using today's newer serger models. Some tension-relief tips:

- First, follow your manual how-to's for tension adjustments. Most manuals show balanced stitches, as well as steps and solutions to common inconsistencies.
- If you are a serging neophyte, test threading and tensions using a different color thread for each position, and if possible, match the threads to the color-coded machine diagrams. (For example, if the path for the left-needle position is marked in blue, use blue thread in that position.) This simplifies accurately identifying portions of the stitch.
- Know how your tension controls work. For most (but not all) sergers: Knobs--turn right to tighten, left to loosen. Lay-in discs--turn up to tighten, down to loosen.
- Adjust only one knob or dial at a time. Test-serge and assess the results. Make further adjustments if necessary.
- Loopy threads indicate too much thread: tighten tensions.
- To expose more thread, loosen tensions.
- If tightening or loosening the tension doesn't change the stitch configuration, troubleshoot the threading paths. Are the threads fully seated in the tension knobs or lay-in discs? Is a thread caught under a cone or spool? Is a thread guide skipped? Is a thread wrapped around a thread guide twice? Is the needle in good condition, the right type and size, and inserted properly?



Changes in fabric and thread type and/or weight, may call for changes in thread tension(s).

- Understand how stitch, thread, and fabric characteristics affect tension.
- Shortening the stitch loosens looper tensions. Lengthening the stitch tightens looper tensions.
- Narrowing the stitch loosens looper tensions. Widening the stitch tightens looper tensions.
- Heavier threads create more drag in the tension controls, and require loosened tensions.
- Stretchy threads stretch as they pass through tension controls and threading guides. Loosen to balance tensions.
- Heavier fabrics, or extra layers of fabric, require more thread for coverage; loosen tensions.
- Lightweight fabrics require less thread for coverage; tighten tensions.
- Before deadlines loom, tinker with tensions. In no time, you'll tame tension, and the idiosyncrasies of your particular serger model.

For answers to this and other serging questions, order *The Ultimate Serger Answer Guide Book* by Naomi Baker, Gail Brown, and Cindy Kacynski and *The Ultimate Serger Answer Guide Video* by Nancy Zieman and Gail Brown.

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