

As Fabric Repair Cafe menders we've compiled this guide to assist novices in their mending tasks. There are many ways to approach each repair. If you find another way works better for you, use that.

BASIC HAND SEWING FOR MENDING

If you are new to hand sewing, you need to have a needle of a diameter that is compatible with the fabric you are sewing (narrower for finer fabrics, thicker for heavier fabrics), and an eye (the opening) large enough that you can insert the thread. For most basic hand sewing, use a needle whose pointy end is sharp. These needles are sometimes called “sharps”. Darning and stretch fabrics require a needle with a blunt or rounded tip; this allows the needle to slip between the knitted fabric threads without cutting them.

You also need thread, which is generally sold as individual spools or sometimes a selection pack. Choose the type of thread content that corresponds to your fabrics, e.g., cotton if your clothing is primarily cotton or other natural fibres, polyester / synthetic or a blend for those types of clothing. You will also need a sharp pair of scissors to cut the thread.

Using a single thread means knotting only one end of the thread either before or after threading. Using a double thread means knotting both ends together on each other after the needle is threaded. Whichever you choose, single or double thread, **DO NOT TIE THE THREAD WITH A KNOT ONTO THE EYE OF THE NEEDLE!**

A double thread can be easier to work with because the needle will not fall off the thread while you are mending. If you use a single thread, you need to use your three outer fingers to gently hold the loose, unknotted end of the thread against the palm of your hand. This is necessary so that you don't pull the needle so far that the loose end of the thread drops out of the eye of the needle.

WHY USE A SINGLE THREAD FOR HAND SEWING?

Easier to work with: Single threading is generally easier to knot, especially for beginners.

Less bulk: Single thread creates a more discreet and less bulky seam, which is ideal for many projects.

Easier to remove stitches: If you need to remove stitches, single thread makes it easier to do so, either with a seam ripper or by snipping in sections and pulling out the longer threads.

WHY USE A DOUBLE THICKNESS OF THREAD?

Stronger seams: Double threading can create stronger seams, which is useful for heavier fabrics or projects that require durability. Double thickness of thread is also more suitable for buttons on most fabrics, except the most delicate ones.

Easier to sew with: Some people find that double threading is easier to sew with, as it can prevent the unknotted, shorter end of the thread from slipping through the needle eye.

Can be more bulky: Double threading can create a more bulky seam, which may not be ideal for all projects.

HOW TO THREAD A NEEDLE

Use Good Lighting and Thread Needle in front of White Background

Let there be light so you can see clearly to thread quickly! You'll be able to see the eye of the needle much more clearly in front of a white or light background versus a dark background.

Cut Thread with Sharp Scissors

Sharp scissors will leave a *crisp, clean edge* on your thread whereas dull scissors will cause the thread to snag and *leave a fuzzy end* that is impossible to thread through a needle. Cut the thread on a diagonal to create a pointy end to push through the eye of the needle.




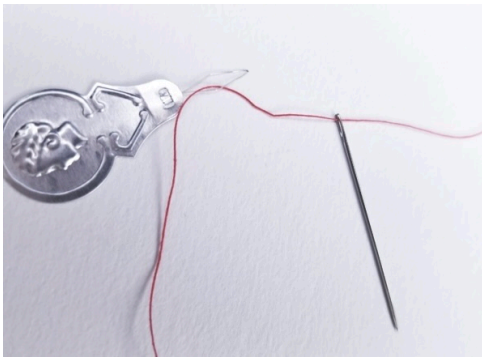
Moisten Tip of Thread or Eye of Needle

The moisture in the eye will *draw the thread in as you push*, allowing you to easily thread the needle. Alternatively, you can *moisten the tip of the thread* and this works just as well. Most people moisten the thread by slipping one of the cut ends into their mouth and pressing their lips together. Then draw the thread out through closed lips and this helps flatten the thread to make threading easier. If you prefer, keep a little cup of water near you and hold the needle or thread between your thumb and forefinger; dip them into the water to moisten them.

Use a Needle Threader (optional)

A needle threader can make it easier to thread a needle especially when vision is reduced. A needle threader is a small handled tool attached to an angled diamond-shaped “loop” of thin wire. It is used to pull thread through the eye of a needle. There are a few types of needle threaders but all work the same way. The most common needle threader is the simple metal version shown below.

The size of the needle is incredibly important when using a needle threader. The reason the wire of the needle threader is so thin is that it's flexible enough to fit through tiny eyes. But, there are some eyes so small that no threader can fit.

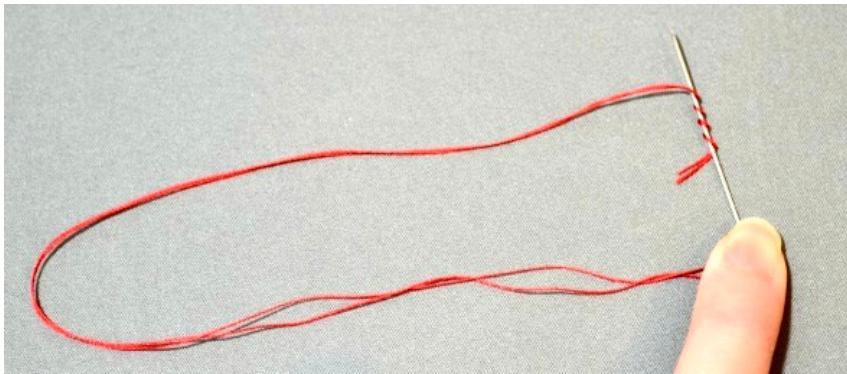
<p>First stick the pointy tip of the wire portion of the needle threader through the eye of the needle. Slide the needle along the wire until it is next to the flat part of the threader. (This image shows how the two wires compress as they slide through the eye of the needle.)</p>	
<p>With the needle resting next to the flat part of the threader, the wire will resume its diamond shape. Push the end of the thread through the open wire. (In this image, the thread is the rounded loop at the top.)</p>	
<p>Holding the handle of the threader in one hand, use your other hand to slide the eye of the needle off the end of the wire and onto the thread. (The image shows that a doubled thread is now through the eye of the needle.)</p>	
<p>Separate the two strands of thread (as shown in the image on the right). Leaving one strand through the eye of the needle, slide the other single thread out of the wire of the needle threader.</p> <p>Adjust the thread length on either side of the needle to sew with either a single (or double) strand of thread. Tie a knot at the cut end (or ends) of the thread and you are ready to sew!</p>	

HOW TO TIE A KNOT IN THREAD

Finger method: Hold the single thread end or the double thread ends together between your thumb and forefinger and loop the longer portion of thread a couple of times around your finger. Holding the thread between your thumb and your finger, roll the thread off the end of your finger. Pull the rolled threads tight to make a knot. To create friction that makes it easier, lick your thumb and finger or dip the thread in a little water before you wrap the thread.

Needle method:

Wind the thread ends around the needle, three, four or five times.



Gently pull the needle through the loops and pull it down to the end of the thread.

REPLACING BUTTONS

Purchasing supplies

It is best to take your garment with you when you go to buy buttons, so you can test that the button(s) will fit into the buttonholes properly and look good alongside any others on the garment. If you need needles and thread, you can get them all at the same time.

Fabric and Notions stores sell a variety of buttons and other sewing supplies. Trillium Button Neveren's Sewing Supply, located at 480 Queen Street W in Toronto is well-known for its selection of sewing supplies and notions, specializing in buttons.

HOW TO SEW ON A BUTTON

Prepare the needle and thread

For most button sewing, thread the needle with a double thread and knot the end, that is, knotting the two loose ends so they are tied to each other. It is easiest to work with a sewing length of thread that is not longer than the distance of your wrist to your elbow, say 12 inches. So, start with a length of thread up to 24 inches long.

If a needle with a large eye is used, it can be threaded with 4 strands of thread instead of two. Fold a longer length of thread (maximum 48" long) in half and pinch the folded end of the thread as you put it through the eye of the needle. Tie a knot in the ends of the thread farthest from the needle. With this quadrupled thread thickness, only one half the number of stitches will be needed to sew on the button.

Locate the spot where the button needs to be applied.

For any type of button, ensure that the replacement button is sewn in a place it belongs. This will ensure that all the buttons are aligned properly and share equally in the work of holding the garment together.

It is easiest to position the button properly if the garment already fits perfectly and there are buttons above and below the missing button; simply button them up and use the "empty" buttonhole as a guide. Shift or slide the buttonhole side of the garment up or down to ensure that the existing buttons are positioned in the middle of their buttonholes. Locate the middle of the buttonhole where the button is missing; this is the precise place where the replacement button should be centred.

If the garment fits well, a button may be sewn back on in the same location. If the fabric is stretched tightly and is pulling at the location of a button, you may be able to move the button $\frac{1}{4}$ " to $\frac{1}{2}$ " to allow more ease in the garment. If the garment is too loose, you may be able to move one or more buttons so that the garment fits more snugly.

If you want to move a button to make a garment looser (or tighter), you may have to adjust some buttons above and below the one that is moved. Put the garment on so that you can make sure the fabric looks smooth and the garment will fit when the buttons are moved. While

you have the garment on, put a pin in the new location for the button(s). Sometimes there will not be enough extra fabric to move buttons to make something larger and sometimes, the garment will pull to one side if you move buttons to make it smaller. It is a judgement call, one which is better made when you are trying on the item. If the buttons are to be moved, put a straight pin in the new location for each button before you take the garment off. It is ideal to precisely mark the intended centre of the location of the replacement button with a straight pin. Undo the buttons that remain and remove the garment.

Once the garment is laid out in front of you, button it up again so your “guiding buttons” are in place. Use your threaded needle to begin the sewing-on process while the garment is buttoned up. Insert the needle just above or below the centre of the buttonhole. Working from the outside of the garment (above the buttonhole), make a small stitch in the fabric where the centre of the button will be placed, through to the inside of the garment. Now, unbutton the garment carefully so that the needle does not catch you or the fabric. Make a small stitch centred on the intended button location, this time going up to the outside of the garment. Make a second small stitch in and out in exactly the same location as the first. This is called an **anchor stitch**. An advantage of approaching the first stitch from the outside of the garment is that the initial knot is hidden under the button.

If you prefer the knot to be on the inside of the garment, use a pin to mark where the middle of the buttonhole is, and insert the threaded needle from the underside of the garment. Make two small stitches in the exact same location in the fabric, again, simply as an anchor stitch.

TWO HOLE BUTTON



1. Insert the needle from the back of the fabric through the fabric and up into one of the holes in the button. **PRO TIP:** To help position the needle most easily, use your non-dominant hand as a guide for your sewing hand. Place your thumb beside one hole of the top of the button and pinch gently with your forefinger on the underside of the fabric directly beneath it. This will serve as a guide for where to insert the needle. You can release the pinch as soon as the tip of the needle emerges from the intended hole in the button. Once the needle is halfway through the buttonhole, the tension of the fabric will often hold the needle in place, so you can move your sewing hand to the outside of the garment and draw the needle and thread up through the button. Allow a bit of ease in the thread – there should be no tension between the button and the garment when the button is done up. The stitches should not pucker or pull at the fabric - the thread

holding the button should have enough ease to allow the button to rest comfortably on the buttonhole when the garment is done up.

2. Stick the needle back into the other hole, push it halfway through to the underside of the garment and pull it out on the underside.
3. Repeat the two steps above until the thread goes up and down through the button at least 4 times or you feel that the button is secure.
4. Finish by taking the needle through the button to the back of the fabric. Stitch an anchor stitch, that is, two small stitches through the fabric in the same location. Knot the thread at the back of the fabric as close to the fabric as possible. One approach is to make a loop in the thread and then, with a needle, a pin, or your fingers, slide that loop down the thread so it rests adjacent to the fabric before drawing the loop tight to create a knot. **PRO TIP:** You can then “bury the tail” of the thread by inserting the needle between the two layers of fabric, and then drawing the needle out again about an inch above or below where the button is positioned. Clip the thread.

FOUR HOLE BUTTON

The most common ways four-hole buttons are stitched are with parallel stitches or a crisscross pattern. If there are other buttons on the garment, check which pattern they use and do the same.



1. For parallel stitches, begin as you would for a 2-hole button, with a knot and an anchor stitch. You can start by inserting the needle up from the inside of the garment, through the fabric. Then, pass the needle through one of the empty button holes adjacent to the one you have just come up through. Once you are on the underside, take your next stitch up through one of the “empty” holes. Sew at least 3 passes of thread through each pair of holes.



2. Or, if you are sewing a crisscross pattern, apply the needle to the holes at a diagonal. Make at least 3 passes on each diagonal.
3. Anchor stitch and knot the thread in the same manner as the two-hole button.

SHANK BUTTON



A shank button is often found on coats and jackets. It has no holes in the face of the button but has a loop or shank on the back.

A shank button makes it much easier to button a thick garment. The loop on the back of the button allows a little extra room for the thicker fabric through which the button is going. The shank means there is less pulling of the button once it is buttoned up. With a shank of the proper length, the button will rest comfortably on the outside of the buttonhole and the garment will not strain or pucker where the buttons are.

1. Double-thread a needle and knot the end.
2. Locate the place where the button will be applied and insert the needle into the back of the fabric just underneath where the button will go. Make an initial anchor stitch, just stitching the fabric twice, not inserting the needle into the shank of the button.
3. Bring the needle to the front of the fabric close to where the shank should sit. Thread the needle through the loop of the shank and back down into the fabric close to the shank. Continue these stitches until the button is secure. **PRO TIP:** It's fine for the thread holding the shank button to let the button droop a little when the garment is open.
4. Take the needle to the back of the garment and use an anchor stitch and knot the thread.

Creating a Thread Shank for a flat button

If you must use a flat button (one without a shank) on thick fabric such as a heavy jacket or jeans, create a shank out of thread.



1. Thread a needle, make a knot in the end, do an anchor stitch, and bring the needle from the back of the fabric to the front in the place where the button is to be positioned.
2. Before you take the first stitch from the front down into the button, place a toothpick parallel to the surface of the button between the two holes, allowing the thread to pass over the toothpick. Pull the thread just tightly enough over the toothpick so it will stay in place as you continue sewing. (See right-hand photos above, noting that these images show a four-holed button.)
3. Reinsert the needle back up into the first hole. The thread should go through the button and around the toothpick at least 4 times.
4. From the underside of the garment, insert the needle back up into the fabric close to the other stitches, BUT NOT THROUGH THE BUTTON this time. The needle will be between the fabric and the button. If the button is a large diameter, this could be a tight fit. If it is, be patient and wriggle the needle until you are able to get it completely through the fabric. Remove the toothpick and draw / slide the button away from the fabric to make room to wrap the thread around the strands of thread between the fabric and the button. Wrap it a few times to create a shank. (See left hand photo above showing the shank made of thread.)
5. Insert the needle back into the fabric between the button and the fabric, close to the stitches and through to the inside of the garment. An anchor stitch, (the double stitch that goes only through the fabric, not the button), is recommended before knotting on the inside of the garment and clipping the thread.

Thank you to the people who shared online descriptions and photos and to Fabric Repair Café volunteers who contributed greatly to these instructions.

Need to know how to repair an item? Many sewing sites as well as YouTube Videos are useful when searching for a technique.

The following sources were used while compiling this guide.

Sew to Live: Live to Sew by Erika Mulvenna: <https://sewsitall.blogspot.com/2010/10/hnd-sewing-basic-stitches.html>

Mindymakes.com

Our Daily Craft by Sarah E. White: <https://www.ourdailycraft.com>

Mindful living network article by Andrea Greengard: <https://mindfullivingnetwork.com/how-to-sew-a-button/>