



Which Kind of Elastic Is Best?

ELASTIC IS CHEAP

Elastic can significantly affect the fit of a diaper and using the right elastic is key to getting the fit you want. But, only you can determine which elastic best fits your needs. Elastic is cheap so get a little of a few kinds and try them out to see what you like to sew and what works well for your baby. I can tell you what I use and what works for me but there's no reason to limit yourself to that.

WIDTHS

Elastic's come in a wide variety of widths but the two most common for diapers are ¼ and 3/8 inches wide. I always use ¼ inch wide elastic but that may be out of habit than for an actual reason. Try both to see which you like best.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Knit elastic is easy to find locally, easy to sew, and has a very soft return so it doesn't leave marks on little thighs. Unfortunately, this soft return also makes it less than ideal for diapers made using thicker fabrics or additional body layers. Knit elastic works well in pocket diapers and other thinner diapers such as AI2 shells made with a layer or two of flannel inner. This elastic seems to hold up well to frequent washing.

Polybraid (sometimes called braided or woven) elastic is easy to sew, easily purchased locally, and has a stronger return than knit elastics. This stronger return can be especially good for thicker fabrics but can be a little harsh on babies with larger thighs and may leave marks. This elastic is a favorite for many because it holds up particularly well to frequent washing and drying.

Cotton swimwear elastic is difficult to find locally and usually must be ordered online. It creates a fantastic gather even on thicker layers but has a soft return that isn't likely to leave marks on thighs. While this elastic has never failed me personally, for some it doesn't hold up well in the wash. This is my personal favorite for ease of sewing, great gathers and soft return.

Lastin elastic is sometimes difficult to find locally (Lastin is a brand name and is of high quality not to be confused with regular "clear" elastic which tends to be lower quality) and must usually be ordered online. It has the ideal gather and soft return for diapers but can be difficult to work with and tends to break after only a little use if not sewn correctly. I think Lastin is an ideal elastic for diapers if you can master sewing it. If you want some of my personal tips on sewing Lastin, keep reading --

How I sew Lastin

Lastin is so totally different from other elastics and people are very divided on how they feel about it. Either they love it, or they hate it. I happen to love it but that wasn't always the case. Since it's such fabulous elastic for diapers because it has the ability to gather particularly well without being harsh on little thighs, I want to share my experiences so that others might have a better chance of loving Lastin too. You might find something else works for you and that's great. Don't try to fix what isn't broken. I just want to share what works for me.

BREAKAGE

Either you've heard about Lastin breaking, or you've experienced it. If you are the later, I am so sorry! I know how disappointing that can be. I've been there too. I wanted to know what mayhem and foolishness was going on inside that diaper so, I did some Lastin sewing on some scraps so I could see what was happening. I discovered

that holes were forming where my needle went through the elastic. Okay, there's not really a way to avoid that since needle=holes right?

While we can't avoid putting holes into the lastin, we can keep those holes from growing so big that the elastic actually breaks. After a lot of experimenting (and I encourage you to experiment on scraps yourself, it's interesting to see), I found that how hard I pulled the elastic was directly proportional to how big those holes would become. Fortunately, you don't get much benefit from stretching Lastin more and more. It'll create a great gather without using any muscle. Overstretching is the biggest culprit of Lastin breakage.

HOW MUCH IS THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF STRETCH?

Stretching regular elastic, including braded, knit, and woven elastics, is pretty straightforward. You stretch it to the point that it basically says "I'm done. That's it. STOP!". But Lastin is a tricky little guy to read. While a 5 inch piece of knit elastic might stretch to 10-11 inches long, Lastin will stretch 1-18+ inches if I fully stretch it (more if I want to really show it who's boss) But, if I fully stretch it, there's a really good chance it'll break, and a good chance it'll be too tight.

So how much should I stretch it? Slightly more than double. My "formula" is this-- I start stitching in the inseam with no elastic so I can do my backstitches (more on this later.. never backstitch on lastin) then I start the elastic (folded over a little for strength) BEFORE the elastic mark and without stretching it (this is how I tack down so I can have something to stretch against). Then, I know, for example, that the length between elastic marks is 11 inches. I'm going to grab the elastic at about 5 inches (because that's slightly more than half of the 11 inches of fabric I need to sew it to) from the needle and stretch it all the way to the other elastic mark.

I'm making the elastic stretch slightly more than double. If I need to cover the 6.5 inches across the front, I'd grab it at about 3 inches from the needle.

I know this isn't exact, but in diapers, we're working with fairly small lengths and if you end up stretching a tiny bit more or a tiny bit less, it's not going to matter. Just grab the relaxed elastic at slightly less than your total sewing length and stretch it to that length. Do this a few times and close your eyes and really feel it. Once you get a feel for it, you won't even bother with measuring. Most people who love Lastin have a real "feel" for it.

PRE-STRETCHING

Lastin really benefits from a good pre stretching. Just take your elastic and stretch it real good a few times before you even think about sewing with it. This does tend to lengthen the elastic slightly so if you forget to do this, you might end up using less elastic and overstretching it when you sew. Pre-stretching also loosens the elastic up a bit and it will feel different so if you are stretching it by feel when you sew, it helps a lot to pre-stretch it.

GETTING IT EVEN

So when you think you've gotten the feel of things and you are confident you aren't overstretching your Lastin, you'll probably want to just do things by feel. But, for some reason the legs keep coming out uneven. Did you pre-stretch? Yes? The other reason could be that with the diaper facing the other way, you are stretching slightly differently from one side to the other. The way to avoid this is to mark your elastic at every inch with a little dot. Then sew the first leg as you normally would by doing what feels right. Then, use those dots to figure up exactly how much elastic you used. Mark that length onto your elastic for the second leg (no need to mark every inch.. just one mark will do) so you can be sure your legs are using the same amount of elastic. It's worth mentioning that I find pre-cut Lastin really hard to work with. Just work with the roll of elastic and cut when you are done sewing.

NEVER BACKSTITCH LASTIN

After unpicking the stitches to fix broken elastic for the 5th time, I noticed that at least half of the time the elastic was broken right by my backstitches. It's so ingrained in me to start elastic by stitching forward and then back and then forward and back and then forward again that I STILL find myself trying to do this with Lastin. If you do too, start over. Backstitching creates too many holes in this thin elastic and that end will be too weak to hold up against all the tension. (don't we all know how that feels?)

So if we don't backstitch, how do we tack down the end? Start your needle about an inch before your elastic mark (I'll assume you are working in the seam allowance, but this works for blind elastic too). Without any elastic, start sewing and do the necessary back stitches. Now you are still about 1/2 inch from the first elastic mark. Fold the end of your elastic over onto itself a little and place this folded end under the needle. DON'T stretch and do not, for goodness sakes, back stitch. Just sew until you reach the elastic mark. Now your elastic is tacked down so you can lightly begin to stretch your elastic. For the first inch, be a bit gentle with your stretching and then stretch the amount you feel is right. When you reach the other mark, stop stretching but keep sewing for a few stitches past the end-mark. Cut your elastic and sew off the end of it and then backstitch to lock the threads.

WHICH LASTIN AND WHICH STITCH

Here is my disclaimer: My Lastin might be different than yours. I hear there are different thicknesses and I have

no idea what thickness mine is. You may find that your Lastin needs to be stretched more or less. Don't get too caught up in my wordy details. The real lesson here is that you don't need to stretch the Lastin hard, or even fully for it to do it's job.

I have both 1/4 inch wide and 3/8 inch wide. I prefer the 1/4 inch for diapers that are made from layers that aren't too bulky. The 3/8 inch works better for fabrics that are thicker. 3/8 inch doesn't have more gather in my opinion, but it's stronger which means it's not as gentle on thighs.

I think the only way to correctly sew Lastin is with a 3-step zig zag. If you don't have that stitch, you are missing out. It's basically a "stretch" stitch that allows the thread to have lots of movement so it doesn't "saw" holes in the elastic. A regular zig zag will probably work, but a straight stitch just doesn't.

I like to use the widest setting my machine has which is a 6mm. For length, I find somewhere between a 3 and 4mm works well and anything shorter tends to cause too many holes in the elastic

HOT LASTIN IS WEAK

Try not to stretch Lastin while it's hot from the dryer since it's weaker then and the needle holes are most likely to grow and cause breakage then.

KEEP AN EYE ON IT

If you are worried about breakage etc, make pocket diapers (without casings) for your first few Lastin trials. It'll allow you to peek in and see what's going on with your elastic and if it does happen to break, it'll take you less than 10 minutes to rip it out and replace it. Don't forget to keep some notes on how much you stretched for each diaper so you'll know what works and what doesn't.

Happy Lastin sewing!



...Just a little more

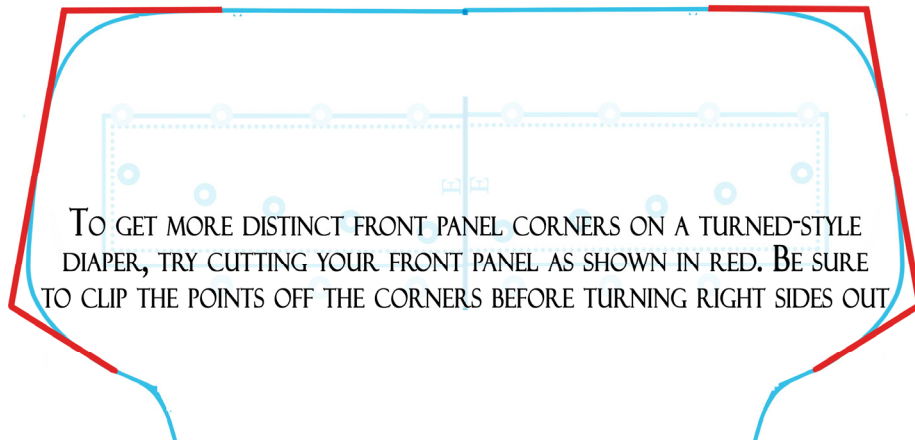


If snaps are placed too low on a side-snap diaper, it can make the thighs of the diaper too small. To avoid this, make sure the thigh snap is placed as far into the corner as possible.

PLACE THIGH SNAP AS FAR
INTO THE CORNER AS POSSIBLE



If you want the corners of the front panel to be a little more distinct/sharper on a turned style diaper, cut and sew them square instead of rounded.





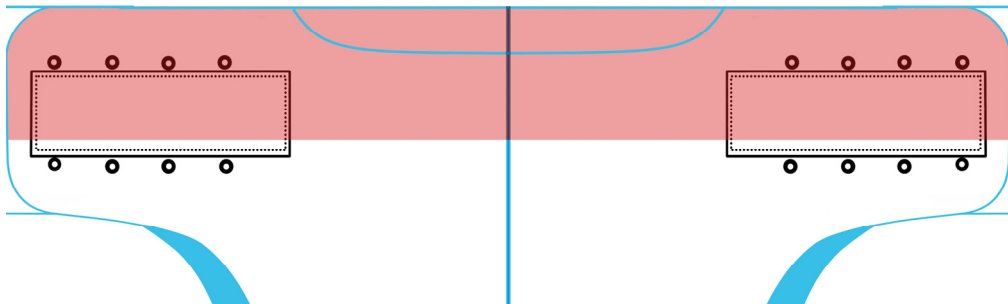
To give hook & loop diapers, especially newborn diapers, more adjustability in the rise, use loop fabric across the entire front panel in place of a strip of loop tape.



When making front hook and loop diapers, sew a size tag in the very center to help easily identify the center of the loop tape during diaper changes.



Mimic a sham pocket opening by making the elastic-covering strip 2-2.25 inches (size of pink area shown) with a length and shape traced directly from the back edge of the diaper pattern. Assemble the pocket diaper following the pattern directions but attach the strip along the entire back and side edges. Cut and sew inner layer as per the pattern.



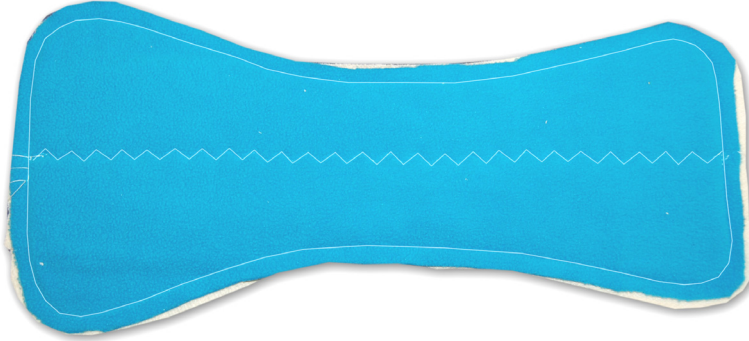
ZigZag Mock-Overlock Soakers

When serging isn't an option and the soaker is too thick to turn and topstitch, a zigzag stitch can be a functional alternative.

1. Stack layers as for the finished soaker and 3-step zigzag, zigzag, or straight stitch directly down the center.

2. Straight stitch around soaker 3/8 inch from raw edges

Your edges will likely look a little messy at this point.



3. Using very sharp scissors, trim all edges evenly very close to stitching,

This is your opportunity to clean up those messy edges.



4. Cover raw edges with a zigzag stitch.

Your zigzag stitch should be set to a medium-short length. Width isn't important. What is important is that the zig goes through the fabric and the zag goes just off the edge. To check, simply turn the hand-wheel until you can see where the needle will drop on each side of the zigzag. Length should be 2mm or less.



~Finishing Pocket Edge using a Hidden Body Layer~

A pocket diaper with a hidden body layer creates the option to finish the pocket opening edge by turning and topstitching the pocket edge and adding elastic. Consider this option for pocket fitted diapers to create a more absorbent body.

1. Cut all diaper body layers, including hidden body layer, according to chosen diaper sewing directions.

“Turned Diapers with Rolling Inseam” p.10 OR “Turned Diapers with Elastic Casings” p.14 OR “Serged Diapers” p.19

2. Cut away pocket opening curve along back edge of the innermost AND hidden body layer.

3. Cut a strip of fabric to be used as an elastic covering. Use the following measurements:

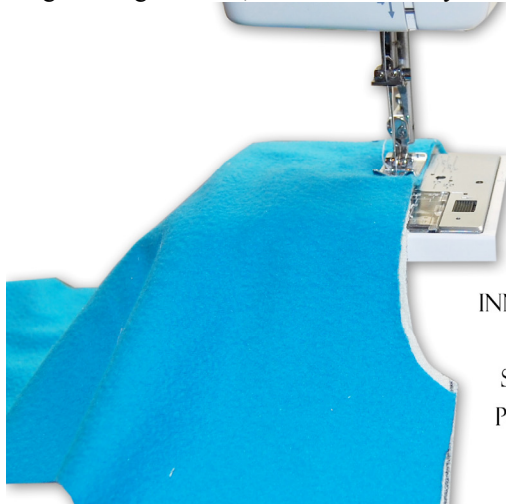
Small	Medium	Large	Extra Large
1.25 x 10 inches	1.25 x 10.5 inches	1.25 x 12 inches	1.25 x 12.5 inches

4. Place innermost layer and hidden layer right sides facing together.

5. Using 3/8 inch seam allowance, sew layers together along the pocket curve only.

6. Sew elastic onto the seam allowance covering the 5 center inches of the curve.

Use a zigzag or 3-step zig zag stitch. Stretch the elastic as you sew. Using gentle elastic such as 1/8 inch wide elastic will create a very soft gather. If using a stronger elastic, stretch elastic only 70-80% so the gather isn't too tight.



INNER LAYER AND HIDDEN LAYER
RIGHT SIDES FACING
SEWN TOGETHER ALONG THE
POCKET OPENING CURVE ONLY

7. Turn layers right sides out.

8. Topstitch over newly created seam. Stitch around elastic being sure not to catch elastic in the stitches.



9. Begin pocket directions at step 1 for either: “Optional Pocket Opening for Turned Diapers” OR “Optional Pocket Opening for Serged Diapers”

Consider this the innermost diaper body layer when following either pocket sewing directions.