



How To Guide

Knitting Needles

You might think that knitting needles would be the simplest part of learning to knit, but there are actually a few different kinds available that are suitable for different kinds of knitting.

Sometimes a pattern will state the right kind of needles to use and sometimes you'll have to decide what is most comfortable to use. Chances are, once you've started your knitting journey, you'll quite quickly collect a range of different sizes, styles, and materials! Take a look at our list to give you a better idea of the tools you are most likely to prefer.



Single Point Knitting Needles

Straight knitting needles are probably what most people imagine when they think about knitting; two sticks with slightly pointed ends, allowing stitches to move back and forth. Many projects can be completed on single point (or 'single end') needles, usually made of separate parts that then have to be sewn together. You will mostly likely find this range of sizes:

- 15cm – often used for children's knitting needles, these shorter sets are great for smaller items and sit much closer to your hands.
- 25cm – can be used for full sized items made up of smaller parts, or smaller items that use chunky yarn and so require more needle space.
- 30cm – standard size, good for most projects.
- 35cm – standard size, good for most projects.
- 40cm – this longer length is perfect for larger projects, chunkier yarn, and more stitches.



Above: A variety of sizes

When looking for single point knitting needles for beginners, you can sometimes find needles that are different colours or have other identifying features so you can tell one from the other. This can make it much easier for children in particular, as it's easier to distinguish left from right!



Right: Children's knitting needles



Left: Single point knitting needle set

You might also come across square-shaped needles, whose shape make them much easier to grip and so are great for those who struggle with strength issues or hand pain.

If you're a more advanced beginner and you're looking to start a proper needle collection but don't know where to start, many brands offer needle sets that give you a range of sizes all in one go! Look for brands that you trust and materials that feel comfortable in your hands.

Pros: Easy to use – great for beginners. Available in a huge variety of brands, sizes, and materials.

Cons: Not suitable for every project. Ends can get in the way of your arms whilst knitting.

Double Pointed Knitting Needles (DPNs)

Generally available in sets five (very occasionally six), double pointed needles, or DPNs, are shorter needles that are pointed on both ends. These needles are usually used for knitting in the round, which requires the use of both ends of the needle.

Depending on their intended use, DPNs can come in various sizes, but are usually shorter than standard single point needles; DPNs for use with socks, for example, can be as short as 10cm!

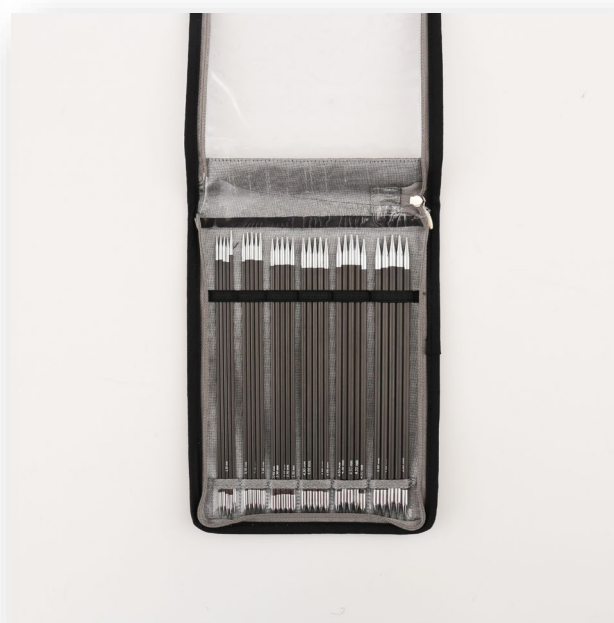
Sleeves, hats, and some decorative items can require DPNs, usually around 15cm, 20cm, or 23cm. You can even find DPNs as long as 40cm.



Above: Different types of DPN's

Using DPNs can be quite tricky and does take some getting used to, but they are useful for many different projects and will often mean you don't have as many seams to sew up. You do have to ensure that your stitches don't fall off the needle on either end (a hazard due to their being no knob on one side), and if you find that juggling four or five needles is a bit much for you but you'd still like to knit in the round, you may find things a lot easier with circular needles.

Some packs of DPNs have needles in different colours to help you keep track of which needle you should be using and when you've reached the end of a round. You'll also find DPN assortment sets that, just like single point needle sets, give a range of sizes all at once so you can build your collection more quickly.



Above: Coloured DPN's and a set of DPN's

Pros: Lets you knit in the round. Still useable if you lose a needle. Can make it easier to keep track of the stitches or rows you've knitted.

Cons: Can be a bit fiddly to hold so many needles at once. Difficult to work on larger pieces with smaller needles.

Fixed Circular Knitting Needles

Circular knitting needles are for use with both knitting in the round and knitting flat due to their structure. Two shanks, like very short knitting needles, are joined by a flexible cable of varying lengths, dependent on your requirement.

Fixed circulars have a permanent join between shank and cable and so have a fixed needle size and cable size. This means it's easier to keep track of which sizes you have in your collection and you can be sure the join between shanks and cable will be smooth and unlikely to catch your work.



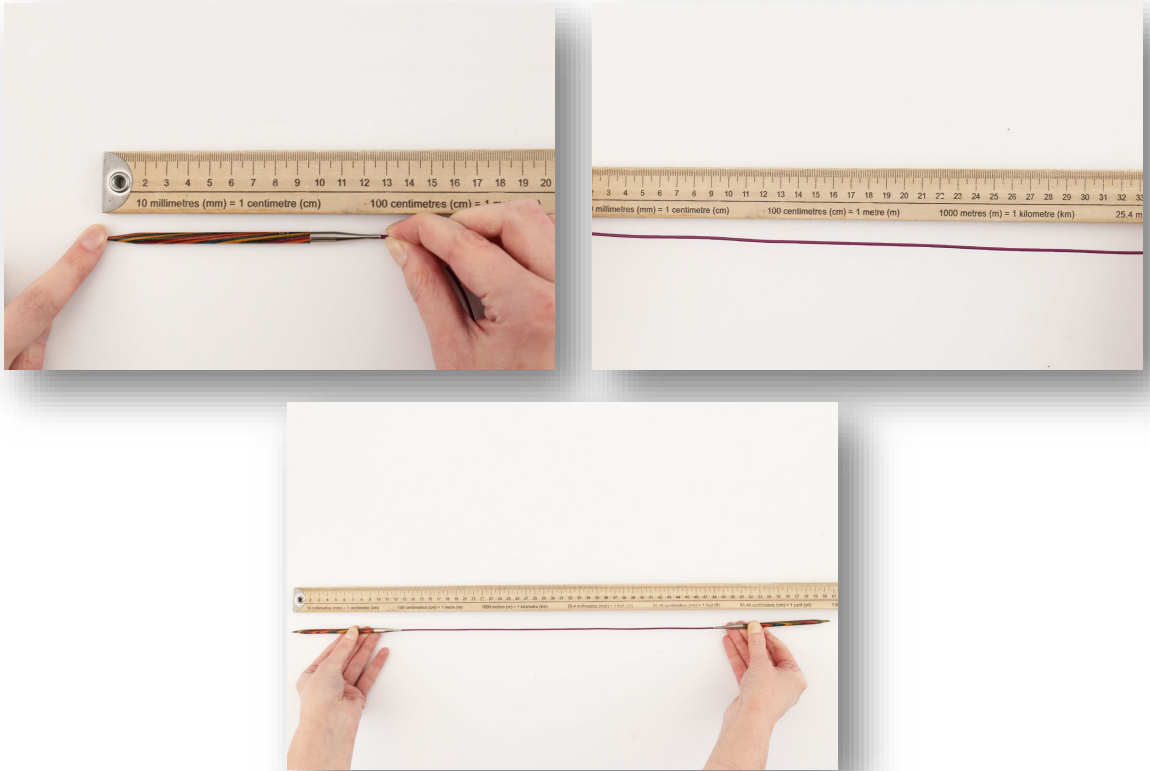
Above: Needle shanks

Shanks come in the usual needle sizes, while cables vary from a tiny 20cm to a whopping 300cm. The much smaller circulars are generally used for items such as socks, while the much longer lengths are usually designed for blankets and throws.



Above: A variety of circular knitting needles

The important thing to remember is that the length of a circular knitting needle is measured from shank tip to shank tip, not the ends of the cable; your 60cm circular knitting needles may have an actual cable length of less than 40cm, but the added length of the shanks give you your full measurement.



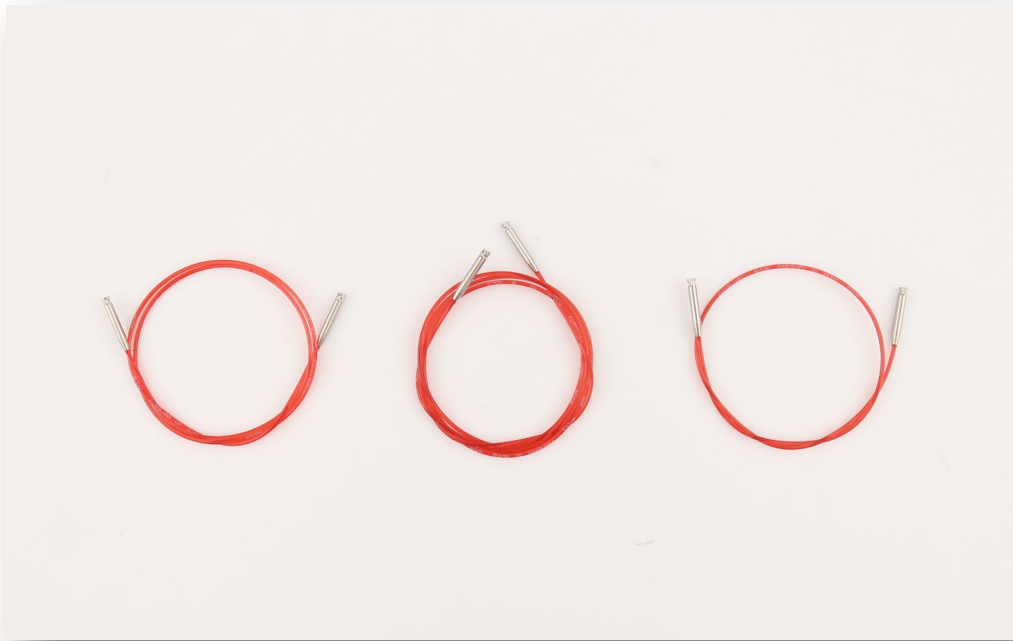
Above: How to measure circular knitting needles.

Circular knitting needles meant for socks tend to have specific traits that make knitting easier. You may get needles that have sharper ends, perfectly suited for use with thinner yarns, and occasionally you will find sets that have one larger shank to help with better grip and a more even tension.



Above: Circular sock knitting needle

If you're knitting with circular needles, you may want to employ the use of a safety cable. Inserted in a safe place in your work, if you find you've made a mistake, it's easy to frog your work back to the safety cable and work your way up again.



Above:

Pros: Much easier to knit in the round – can also knit flat. Smooth joins between shank and cable.

Cons: Needles in use are harder to switch out. Have to buy a whole new set for a new size.

Interchangeable Circular Knitting Needles

Interchangeable circulars have the same uses and sizes as the fixed circulars, but the detachable shanks give you the added bonus of being able to mix and match sizes. Rather than buying circular needles in every size you can simply collect all the shank sizes and all the cable sizes and then combine them as necessary. Look out for shanks of different lengths! Smaller set can only be used with shorter cables of around 40cm.



Above: Two different sized shanks

Many interchangeable circulars come in both sets and individual pieces, so it's easy to get started with a standard collection and then add more sizes as you go. Some crafters find the join between shank and cable to be harder to navigate with interchangeable circulars, but you also have the option of removing your shanks mid-project and attaching them to another cable for a different project altogether - a welcome change of pace!



Above: Interchangeable needle set

You're most likely to find yourself using needle sets with screw in ends, which usually come with a small pin or key that you insert into a small hole in the cable to give you leverage enough to be able to properly tighten the connection and avoid snagging. Click-in connections are less often used but still perfectly practical.

Should you want swap to mid-project, don't forget to attach your ends caps to the cable to ensure none of your stitches are lost – they're essential if you want to store your work safely. If you find yourself with a large collection of cables and no desire to add any more, you may also need a cable connector; this will help you join your cables for extra-large projects, rather than buying a new, extended cable you may only use once!



Pros: Easier to knit in the round. Easier to swap from project to project. Don't have buy a whole new set to get a different size.

Cons: Shanks can come unscrewed slightly whilst working if not tightened beforehand. Knitting can sometimes snag on the join if unscrewed.

As well as the style of needle you need/would like to use, it is also a good idea to consider what kind of material would be best suited to you and your yarn. Quite often this is down to personal preference, but you might also find that certain yarns work better with one material than another.

Wood

Wood needles can come in a variety of forms but are almost always finished with polishing or laminating to ensure a smooth knitting surface that won't snag.

Pros: Warm in the hands. Good grip on your yarn

Cons: Can become quite heavy once you reach larger sizes. May splinter and snag yarn after repeated use. Much smaller sizes can be at risk of snapping.



Metal

Metal needles are often hollow to avoid being too weighty, but you can also get solid needles made from lightweight metal.

Pros: Hard wearing and long lasting. Smooth surface avoids any kind of snagging.

Cons: Can become quite heavy once you reach larger sizes (solid needles). Can be cold in the hands. Metal tapping might set your teeth on edge!



Plastic

Versatile and long lasting, plastic needles allow for all kinds a sizes, even giant ones, without adding a lot to the weight.

Pros: Lightweight, even with very chunky needles. Massive range of sizes, lengths, and styles to choose from. More flexibility.

Cons: Possible seams where the plastic has been joined which can snag. Flexibility can lead to breakages.



Above: A wooden, a metal and a plastic knitting needle