

What You Want to Know About Needles

Lorna Shapiro, August 2020

Here's a link to a recent video that came out from National Sewing Circle claiming to demystify needles... This video is an example of unhelpful information -- it conflates needle type and needle size... and also doesn't explain the major variables differentiating types of needles and why they matter.

https://www.nationalsewingcircle.com/video/sewing-needle-knowledge-006325/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_campaign=A6199&vsoid=A6199

So here's my explanation of needles...

There are four things that identify any needle:

1. **Who made it** (Schmetz, Organ, Superior, Klasse, etc.) -- In my experience, all the well known needle makers make quality needles so this is not of much importance.
2. **What type of needle it is** (Universal, Quilting, Jeans/Denim, Topstitch, Microtex (or Sharp), Metallic, Embroidery, Leather) -- Different types of needle vary in these ways: **shape of point** (sharp, very sharp or ball point), **size and shape of eye** (large or small, oval, rectangular, long oval), **depth of groove running down needle face**. These differences determine how the needle acts on the fabric and works with the thread... **so they are important differences**. You want to know what type of needle you are using. My experience, and that of many experienced quilters I've spoken to, is that Universal needles are universally mediocre, as are quilting needles. Most piecing and quilting wants to be done with a **very sharply pointed needle and those are only Microtex and Topstitch. The Topstitch needle has a bigger eye** and a deeper groove, that makes it work better with metallic or heavy threads. **The Jeans/Denim has a ball point**, which you want for stretch fabrics.
3. **What size the needle is** (60/8 to 110/18 for domestic machines) -- Smaller sizes are for thinner threads, larger sizes for heavier threads. **If your thread is breaking, you likely need a bigger eye and/or a deeper groove**. This can be accomplished by going to a larger needle or switching from a Microtex to a Topstitch. To test if the eye is large enough, thread a loose needle onto a 15" stretch of thread. Hold the thread taut and at an angle... if it slides down easily, the eye is large enough (this tip courtesy of Betty at Mason Sewing). If your thread is still breaking and your needle is new (i.e. not chipped), you likely need a deeper groove -- so go to a larger needle, or to a topstitch if you are using Microtex. If you are skipping stitches, you likely need a larger needle.
4. **What material the needle is made of** (chrome plated steel, titanium coated steel, ceramic coated steel) -- titanium and ceramic coatings purport to last longer... I can't say one way or the other. I've used both but have not done extensive testing. Titanium and Ceramic are more expensive by quite a bit. Ceramic is reportedly better for embroidery machines because it heats up less than metal needles.

Here is a link to Schmetz's needle chart which is worth printing out for reference...

<http://www.schmetzneedles.com/learning/pdf/schmetz-needle-chart.pdf>