Troubleshooting Checklist for Sewing Machines

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Threads are breaking! The tension won't regulate and the bobbin thread is bunching! The machine is frozen and won't move! And, of course, you're on deadline. The machine has *to work!*

There's no need to panic. Take a deep breath and begin checking off the following list of maintenance steps. Minor machine problems occur when the machine has been run too hard without a little TLC (tender loving care).

☐ **Step 1: Turn off your machine!**
Take your foot off the pedal, too. As an industrial machine winds down, the motor continues to spin. The machine will sew with the electricity off if the motor hasn't completely stopped. Don't add stitched fingers to your woes.

☐ **Step 2: Replace the needle.**
Most of the time, this fixes the problem. Insert a new needle of the correct size. Sizes 10 and 12 are for sheers or thin silks and faux silks. Size 14 is for most decorator fabrics, and sizes 16 and 18 are for heavier fabrics and/or more layers.

Ensure the needle is set in properly. Look closely at a machine needle. One side has a groove that runs the length of the shaft. Feel it with your fingernail. The other side has a "scarf," - or an indentation around the eye. The needle is set in the machine so that the thread goes in the eye from the groove side and out the scarf side.

☐ **Step 3: Clean all of the tension disks.** Fuzz and dirt build up between the disks, pushing them apart and preventing them from exerting pressure on the thread as it passes through. (See the photo at right.)

Don't forget the tension disk that feeds your bobbin winder. If it fills with gunk, your bobbin won't be wound with the correct tension.

Did you know that tension disks collect gunk quicker with monofilament thread than with standard polyester and cotton threads? Polyester and cotton threads are fuzzy and they grab and clean fuzz as they pass through the tension disks. Monofilament thread is slick and it doesn't grab and carry fuzz out of the disks.

☐ **Step 4: Rethread the head of the machine.** The thread may have tangled somewhere or jumped out of a tension disk. I have had threads catch intermittently on rough surfaces. After threading, gently pull the thread for 12-24 inches to ensure that it pulls smoothly, with the correct tension and without catching on anything while feeding.