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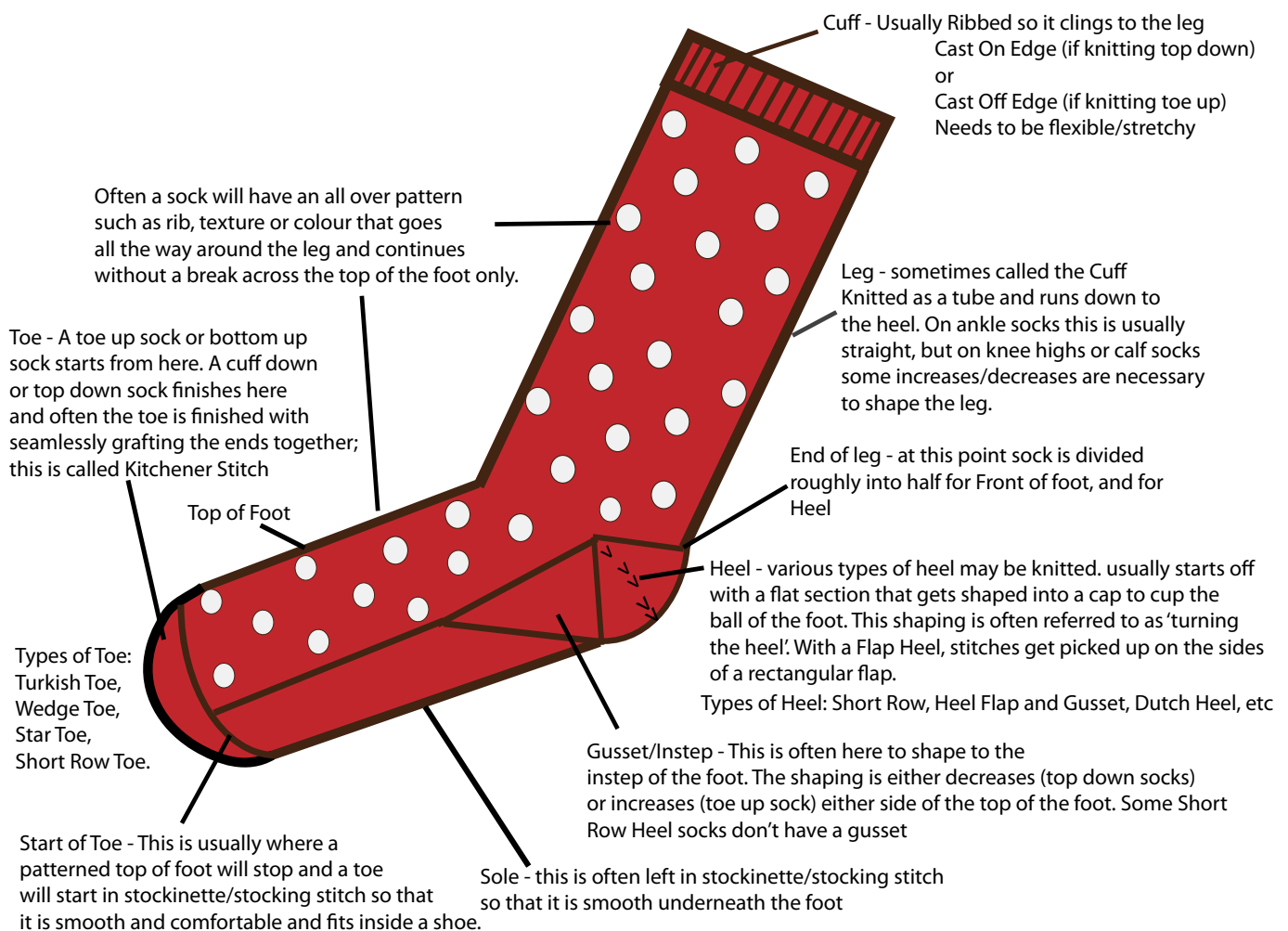
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An Introduction to Sock Knitting

There is no reason why a beginner knitter who has mastered simple stitches, increases and decreases cannot have a go at knitting their first simple sock. However, sometimes the shape of a sock, and the strange terms used for certain parts of the construction, can be a little intimidating, so here are some sock knitting basics.

The Anatomy of a Sock



Some (But Not All) Of The Most Commonly Used Sock Knitting Terms

Cuff: This is the very top part of the sock that circles the ankle. Usually it refers just to the ribbed edge of a sock but sometimes the whole leg of a sock can be referred to as the cuff.

Double Pointed Needles: These are needles that allow knitting in the round. Modern sets of double pointed needles most often have a set of 5, so you would arrange 4 of them in a square top to tail, and use the 5th to knit in a continuous direction to form a tube. More traditionally sock needles used to come in a set of 4, so that 3 were arranged in a triangle and the 4th is used to knit. Although using fewer needles can cause some tightness when turning corners this method is still very popular because it makes sense when working a sock to divide stitches into Heel, Front Left and Front Right sections when knitting and helps a knitter to be more organised.

Flexible Cast On/Cast Off: This is often suggested at the very top edge of a sock because as stretchy as the main knit can be, edges are often restricted and the cuff can bite into a leg. There are several different methods of making this more flexible which you can usually find on-line. One simple method though, is to increase the size of your needle when casting on or casting off, and switching down to your usual needle for the main body of the sock.

Gusset/Instep: This is the part of the sock that runs from the heel into the main part of the foot. It can normally be seen as a triangular shaped area where shaping either side of the foot decreases the number of stitches after a heel flap. Gussets help ease the change of direction from a vertical leg to a horizontal foot and it helps the sock to fit the arch of the foot. Some sock patterns, normally advanced ones, make a feature of this area and have intricate shaping or patterns that show off the change in direction.

Foot: This normally refers to the part of a sock which is after the heel has been worked and instep shaping is complete. In a simple sock it is where the stitch numbers return to more or less the same as was used in the Leg of the sock. It includes both the Top Of The Foot and The Sole. The Sole usually being in stocking stitch and the Top of Foot is in the pattern stitch

Heel: This is the cup-shaped part of the sock that fits around the ball of the sock and is responsible for the 'tube' part of the sock changing direction to go into the foot. There are many types of heel but the most common are the Heel Flap and Gusset, Dutch Heel, or Short Row Heel. On most beginner sock patterns, a Heel Flap is knitted back and forth in rows on half the socks total stitches. Next the heel is turned to make a little cup shape, and then stitches are picked up either side of the heel and then the sock is joined back into a round for the Gusset/Instep part of the sock.

A short row heel achieves a similar effect by making a cup shape by knitting back and forth in short rows, then lengthening those rows again.

Kitchener Stitch: This is a method of seamlessly grafting two edges, by following the stitch path. If you follow the steps given in the *P/Hop Sock: Easy Ribbed Sock Pattern* by Erssie Major there should be no problems. You will not need to memorise or work out the stitch path as the instructions do that for you. Also see the *ErssieKnits YouTube Channel* and other tutorial links on <http://www.erssieknits.com>

Leg: This is normally the part of the sock that encircles the ankle. It can also be referred to as the cuff. On most standard ankle socks, no shaping is done on this part and it is knitted in the round as a tube to fit around the leg. However, for socks that go above the calf there is usually some sort of shaping to fit the wider part of the leg, either increases on a toe-up/bottom-up sock or decreases on a top-down cuff down-sock

Magic Loop: This is more simple than it sounds. It is a method of knitting a smaller circumference like a sock or a glove on one long circular. Even short circular needles do not go down to the small circumferences needed to knit in the round. With this method, your stitches are divided into two halves, one half at one end of your circular, and the rest on the other end, separated by a long loop in between. You work one half of the stitches only, then pull your needle through and bend round into a loop and work the other half of stitches. Keep repeating this and you will be feeding each half of your stitches so they can be worked, and will be working in the round with just one long circular. Some knitters prefer this method to the Two Circular method because it is cheaper to buy one long circular compared with two short circulars.

Provisional Cast On: This is a way of casting on stitches so that instead of forming a permanent edge, stitches can be knitted on in the other direction. A provisional cast on is useful in sock knitting because it is possible to start a toe up/bottom up sock this way. Waste yarn is used either to cast on stitches or make a crochet chain as long as half the circumference of the foot. Next, using the main sock yarn, stitches are either picked up in the loops of the crochet chain or they are knitted on from the waste yarn and a toe can be knitted. When the toe has been shaped, into a cap, and so the knitting has been shaped so that the current working row has now curved around to be parallel with the first row after the provisional cast on, then the waste yarn can be undone to release a row of 'live' loops or stitches and joined into a round with the current working row. However, when knitting in the opposite direction it is worth remembering that as you are picking up stitches that are connecting loops of stitches in the opposite direction, rather than the actual stitches themselves, then you will probably have one less stitch than you would expect. E.g. 20 stitches, only need 19 interconnecting loops. So you will probably have to make one extra stitch before joining into a round to then continue knitting in a tube for the rest of the foot.

Short Rows: This term frightens beginners but is not so difficult to master as you would think. Normally a short row heel and toe are identical in construction so worked the same way. They start from around 50% of the sock leg or foot's total number of stitches. Rows are knitted back and forth, eliminating the end stitches in each row each time so that the rows become shorter and shorter.

However, because turning in a row can cause a hole, the turns are executed with a Wrap and Turn. So the last stitch of each row gets wrapped to the next, thus tightening the gaps and covering the holes. When there is around one third of stitches wrapped each side of the heel or toe, with about one third in the centre unwrapped the rows become longer again by picking up one more stitch and wrap, and knitting together each time. This forms a cup shape and eventually the finish of a short row toe or heel has the same number of stitches as was started with for this section.

Sock Yarn: Most sock yarn is either fingering, 4ply or sport but can also be double knit, aran or chunky too. Yarn which is spun specifically for sock making often has a very small percentage of nylon added to the main fibre to make it hard wearing. Many years ago when there was not such a range of yarns available purely for sock knitting, then sock knitters would often use nylon thread and hold it together with the main yarn to strengthen socks at heel and toe. Or they would at least have doubled up their yarn and knitted a hard wearing slip stitch rib at heels or toes to reduce wear. These days there is a wonderful choice of sock yarns specifically made for this purpose and most people knit socks to be luxury items rather than everyday wear. However many people still swear by handmade socks and there are some budget yarns that can make everyday socks. Remember as well, that small holes in socks can be darned so always keep a little bit of the original sock yarn somewhere to do this.

Sole: This is the very bottom of the foot, and runs out from the heel and instep. It is usually distinct from the top of the foot in that it uses a smooth stockinette/stocking stitch for comfort.

Stitch Markers: These are normally rings, either plastic or metal (and can be decorative) which mark a place in a round. It is useful to mark the beginning of the round at the start of knitting a sock but later can be used either side of the front of the foot, to mark where the instep and/or heel should be. I would not worry about spending an enormous amount on them, as they often get lost anyway. For someone trying out knitting in the round for the first time, an inexpensive marker can be made just by taking a very short section of contrasting yarn and tying both ends together to make a loop which can slip over the needle at the correct point. Stitchmarkers are also useful in marking out long repeats of pattern repeats or colour repeats too.

Toe: The Toe of the foot normally starts at the base of the toes and is shaped so that it narrows towards the end of the toes. In most patterns, the toe uses a smooth stockinette/stocking stitch for comfort after any patterning on the Top Of The Foot.

Turning the Heel: This is a well known expression and often misunderstood. Basically it refers to the part of your heel shaping, that changes the direction of knitting to form a little cap or cup to shape around the ball of the foot and change the direction of the leg of a sock into The Foot.

Two Circulars: This is a method of knitting in the round a little like the Magic Loop, except instead of dividing your stitches into two halves to be knitted at opposite ends, stitches are divided into two and are put onto two short circulars. Then the end of one needle can be used as the working needle to work stitches on the next needle and so forth so that stitches become worked in the round. Slightly easier to understand at first than the Magic Loop, this method is not favoured above it because it means that two sets of circulars in that size would need to be bought instead of just one.

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