

***By Kay Gardiner and Ann Shayne***

## **Do That to Me One More Time. Or Maybe Not**

**Dear Problem Ladies,**

I knit like a fiend in the '80s, the golden era of Cosby sweaters and boxy shapes. My party signature was black jeans and a handknit sweater. Now I find myself completely baffled. Since childbirth, my body has—ahem—changed, and fashions are more body conscious. I have always had a problem choosing clothes because I have a long torso and short legs. I don't know how to alter patterns so that they flatter me. The final straw was the chenille and fun fur number I whipped up for the holidays. It looked great on the model, but let's just say I don't need any more thickness on my upper arms.

Can you help me choose figure-forgiving sweaters? Or can you just bring back the '80s?

***Naked and Clueless***

**Dear Captain of Chenille,**

Say *what?* The '80s are over? You mean we should stop wearing our Qiana leggings? Just when we've perfected the simultaneous wearing of shoulder pads in our blouse, jacket, and trench coat?

The unflattering sweater is the single most difficult knitting issue of our time. Who among us would buy a sweater without trying on seventeen of them in the privacy of a TJ Maxx fitting room? When we are buying clothing, we know how important it is to see exactly how it fits. Not on the hanger, not on the mannequin—how it fits on *you*. So why is it that when we're knitting a sweater, we totally suspend our skepticism about fit?

Clearly, we have decided, as a nation of knitters, to live in denial. We simply overlook the dangers of knitting before fitting. When a sweater doesn't fit, we console ourselves by casting on another sweater.

It doesn't have to be that way. We have a few tips.

**Tip 1.** No chenille. Now, we *love* chenille. We have even *knitted* chenille sweaters, and we bear the psychic scars. We cannot quite figure out the correct user group for chenille. Very skinny women can wear it, but a woman who can get away with chenille will look even better in a sweater that is not chenille. Our suggestion: go for fine gauge, smooth yarns that do not drape or cling.

Please note that we did not address the “fun fur” aspect of your question. Fun fur has been removed from the history books, like Stalin. None of us has ever knit fun fur. We have no idea what you are talking about.

**Tip 2.** No boxy, oversized fit. Everybody looks better with a little shaping. What type? For your long torso/short legs combination, take a peek at the ideas over at [Helium.com](http://Helium.com). Balancing out your body’s proportions is the key. All the Empire waist sweaters you see right now are great for your long torso. A-line garments draw attention away from your waist. Look for knitwear patterns that echo these shapes.

**Tip 3.** No drop-shoulder sleeves. A sweater should include armhole shaping of some kind. A set-in sleeve looks good on everyone. A raglan may also look great on you, but be sure to try on a raglan-sleeve garment before committing to knitting one, because they make one of the Problem Ladies look like Aunt Bea.

**Tip 4.** Remember who’s in charge. Don’t blindly follow the pattern directions on matters such as where the hem of the sweater hits your hip. Think about what length is most flattering and comfortable to you, and generally try to avoid the mid-cheek hem. Think about the neckline also. Think about the sleeve length. These things are not hard to change even if you’re a fairly new knitter. We live in a golden age of great sweater patterns, with many options for customizing and getting it right. It’s worth the effort to figure this out.



*Knit Strong! Keep those cards and letters coming in to [problemladies@twistcollective.com](mailto:problemladies@twistcollective.com)*