

By Kay Gardiner and Ann Shayne

When Good Stockinette Goes Bad



Dear Problem Ladies,

I am a [fictional knitter](#)*, but my problem is all too real. Here's what I want to know: Why does my stockinette stitch look all ridgy and corrugated, like a stretch of freeway that's being resurfaced? Do you even know what I am talking about? Is this something knitters have all agreed not to mention? Is it unspeakable? Am I untouchable?

Crinkled in Cleveland

Dear Crinkled,

Of course we know what you're talking about, and yes, we'd rather not mention it. But now that you've blurted it out in public, we are going to deal with it like adults.

The rumble-strip appearance of your stockinette is a common malady. Ridginess occurs because you are purling looser than you knit. As a result, your stockinette is composed of alternating rows of tight and loose stitches. This is not visible over a couple of rows, but over a longer distance, the alternating tight and loose rows create a visible pattern of horizontal ridges. (Profound Knitting

Truth: Anything that is repeated becomes a pattern.)

There are two groups of knitters who never have this problem:

- 1. The Naturally Perfect.**
- 2. Those who knit stockinette exclusively in the round.**

This latter group holds the key to understanding the problem. Why? Because they never purl.

To indulge the Problem Ladies, knit a tube of stockinette in the round, and see if you still have the problem. You don't, right? That's because when you work stockinette in the round, you are always knitting, never purling, so the tension of your stitches is consistent, and there is no ridginess.

We hear you whining: What the hell can I do about that? How can I possibly knit looser or purl tighter when I don't even know I'm doing it? Why is knitting so hard?

Get a grip on yourself. The Problem Ladies have been spanning the Interwebs to find solutions for you. Pick one, then go and sin no more.

1. Try a Looser Gauge. Before you do anything else, consider whether this problem is the result of some peculiarity of the yarn or the gauge. Ridginess sometimes occurs because the yarn is being knitted to a gauge that is tighter than it wants to be knitted. This happened recently to a Problem Lady who wishes to remain anonymous. In a moment of uncharacteristic economy, she substituted a stash yarn that is supposed to be knit to 5 stitches per inch for a yarn that is supposed to be knit to 5-1/2 stitches per inch. If you think this may be the cause of your problem, try knitting a swatch in a slightly looser gauge. If that eliminates the ridginess, you will have to adjust the pattern to suit your gauge, or knit a smaller size—the lazy way to re-gauge a pattern.

2. Try Different Size Needles. Try working the purl rows with a smaller needle than the knit rows. Seriously! This has been known to work. (Caution: if you're like the Problem Ladies, there is a danger of doing this backwards and making your fabric even ridgier than before.) But it just . . . might . . . work.

3. Try Knitting All Crazylike. Another tried and true method is to work all your knit stitches through the back loops, as in Annie Modesitt's "combination knitting" method. Knitting

through the back loops twists the stitches, making them a bit tighter, which at first seems to be a step in the wrong direction. However, when you work the purl stitches, you untwist them as you go, and this makes your knit stitches looser than they would otherwise be. Believe it or not, there are knitters who knit this way all the time, and swear by it. Try it!

4. Use Your Newfound Knowledge. One Problem Lady found that understanding the root cause of her ridginess was enough to start her on the road to improvement. She discovered that she actually could control the tension of her stitches. Like that guy who used to bend spoons, she fixed her gauge with the Power of the Mind. Knowing that it was the loose purl row that caused the problem, she began to purl ever so slightly more tightly. It was simply a matter of holding the yarn a bit more snugly, and working the purl stitch with a tiny bit more firmness. With a bit of experimentation, over the course of a sleeve, the ridginess diminished and eventually vanished. It wasn't a pure, stinkin' miracle, but it sure seemed like one.

5. Stop Caring. This is a totally valid approach, not only to this particular problem, or even to knitting. Consider, especially if your ridges are faint, that this may simply be The Nature Of Knitting. With some yarns, the corrugation factor reduces with blocking, washing, and wear. In fact, before you try any solution, your first step should be to wash and block your swatch to see if the crinkle disappears or diminishes. Those interlocking knit and purl rows are pulling on each other, and the tension between them tends to even out with time.

The Problem Ladies

Linkography: Combination Knitting at anniemodesitt.com

**While the Problem Ladies can cook up imaginary problems all day long, they would love to answer real questions from you. Please email your problems to problemladies@twistcollective.com. And include photos if you need to show us the problem.*