

FREE KNITTING TROUBLESHOOTING GUIDE

Why Does My Knitting Look Like That?

12 common knitting problems — what causes them and exactly how to fix every single one.

- 12 Real Problems
- Plain-English Causes
- Step-by-Step Fixes
- Prevention Tips

A Free Gift for Our Community □

Your Knitting Is Fine. Here's How to Prove It.

Every knitter — from rank beginner to seasoned pro — has held up their work and thought "...why?" The good news is that almost every knitting problem has a completely logical cause and a simple fix.

This guide covers the 12 most common frustrations we hear about in our community. For each problem, we'll explain what's happening physically in your stitches, give you a clear fix, and tell you how to prevent it next time.

Problem #01: Twisted Stitches

WHAT'S HAPPENING: Your stitches look crossed or twisted at the base rather than open like a smooth V.

WHY IT HAPPENS: You're inserting the needle into the back leg of the stitch instead of the front leg. This twists the stitch as it wraps around the needle.

HOW TO FIX IT:

- Check your needle entry: for a knit stitch, insert the needle into the **FRONT** leg of the stitch from left to right
- For Continental knitters: double-check you're wrapping yarn counterclockwise
- For English/throwing knitters: make sure you're not accidentally picking up the back leg
- Practice slowly on 20 stitches, watching each insertion carefully

□ **PRO TIP:** Intentionally twisted stitches (knitting through the back loop, or 'ktbl') ARE a real technique used for texture. If your pattern says 'ktbl', you're doing it on purpose!

Problem #02: Yarn Splitting

WHAT'S HAPPENING: Your needle keeps splitting the yarn instead of going through the stitch, creating fuzzy, uneven stitches.

WHY IT HAPPENS: Your needle tip is too sharp for the yarn's construction, OR you're catching individual plies instead of going between the twist of the yarn.

HOW TO FIX IT:

- Switch to a blunter needle tip — wooden or bamboo needles are often better for plied yarns
- Slow down and consciously guide the needle tip between the full strand of yarn, not through it
- Check if the yarn is 'loosely plied' — these split more easily and need gentler handling
- Try knitting slightly looser — tight tension makes splitting worse

□ **PRO TIP:** Loosely twisted or single-ply yarns (like some handspun) are notorious splitters. They make gorgeous fabric but need extra care and blunt needles.

Problem #03: Unexpected Holes in Stockinette

WHAT'S HAPPENING: Random holes appear in your stockinette fabric that you didn't put there intentionally.

WHY IT HAPPENS: A yarn over was made accidentally — most commonly when moving the yarn from back to front (or vice versa) between a knit and a purl without also passing it properly under the needle.

HOW TO FIX IT:

- Check your yarn position before every stitch: yarn to BACK for knit, yarn to FRONT for purl
- When moving between knit and purl, always pass the yarn UNDER the needle to change position
- If working from a chart, double-check you didn't accidentally work a 'yo' in your pattern
- For holes already made: drop down to the hole row, pick out the extra wrap, and re-knit back up

□ **PRO TIP:** In knitting, a 'yarn over' between stitches is a deliberate increase that creates a hole. Once you understand this, you'll be able to identify exactly where an accidental YO happened.

Problem #04: Uneven Tension / 'Rowing Out'

WHAT'S HAPPENING: Your knit rows and purl rows look visibly different — one looser, one tighter — creating a 'striped' texture in what should be smooth stockinette.

WHY IT HAPPENS: Most knitters apply slightly different tension when knitting vs. purling. Purling is anatomically less natural for most people and often comes out looser.

HOW TO FIX IT:

- Practice purling with slightly more tension — consciously snug the yarn after each purl stitch
- Try Portuguese knitting style for purl-heavy sections — it dramatically evens tension for many knitters
- Use a needle size SMALLER for purl rows if the problem is persistent
- Block aggressively — many tension issues largely disappear with proper wet blocking

□ **PRO TIP:** The easiest way to eliminate rowing out entirely is to work stockinette entirely from the right side by knitting in the round, even for flat projects — just seam the side later.

Problem #05: Panic! I Dropped a Stitch

WHAT'S HAPPENING: A live stitch has fallen off the needle and is running down through previous rows, creating a ladder of loose yarn.

WHY IT HAPPENS: The stitch was pushed off the needle end (usually by accident, or when setting work down), and if not caught immediately, gravity does the rest.

HOW TO FIX IT:

- Stop knitting IMMEDIATELY — don't panic, dropped stitches can always be fixed
- Place a stitch marker, safety pin, or DPN needle through the dropped loop so it can't run further
- Use a crochet hook sized close to your needle: insert hook through dropped loop from front to back
- Hook the horizontal bar above the stitch and pull it through the loop — repeat up each row

□ **PRO TIP:** A crochet hook is a knitter's best friend for dropped stitch rescue. Buy a set of small crochet hooks and keep them in your project bag permanently.

Problem #06: Edges Curling Inward

WHAT'S HAPPENING: The left and right edges of your flat knitting curl toward the purl side, making it hard to measure and frustrating to seam.

WHY IT HAPPENS: Stockinette (knit on RS, purl on WS) curls — this is a mathematical property of the stitch structure, not a mistake. It's perfectly normal.

HOW TO FIX IT:

- Add a 2–4 stitch border of garter stitch (knit every row) or seed stitch on each edge to prevent curling
- Wet block your finished pieces — this relaxes the fiber and largely stops curling
- For scarves or blankets: choose an all-garter, seed stitch, or ribbing pattern that lies flat naturally
- If the edge curl is in a garment piece: don't panic — it straightens when seamed

□ **PRO TIP:** Curling edges in stockinette aren't a problem to solve — they're a reminder that stockinette is meant for garments where edges are seamed, not standalone flat pieces.

Problem #07: Gauge Is Always Wrong

WHAT'S HAPPENING: Your swatched gauge never matches the pattern's gauge, making you nervous about starting the project.

WHY IT HAPPENS: Gauge is the number of stitches and rows per inch — it varies with needle size, yarn, tension, and the individual knitter. It's expected to vary.

HOW TO FIX IT:

- Knit a true swatch: cast on 6+ more stitches than the gauge calls for, knit 6+ more rows
- Wet block your swatch EXACTLY as you will the finished garment before measuring
- Measure in the CENTER of the swatch, not near the edges
- If stitches/inch are too MANY: go up a needle size. Too FEW: go down a needle size
- Aim for correct stitch gauge (horizontal) — row gauge adjusts more easily in the pattern

□ **PRO TIP:** Your gauge swatch IS your project's first investment. Knitters who skip swatching don't save time — they lose hours frogging a finished sweater that doesn't fit.

Problem #08: Joining in the Round Creates a Twist

WHAT'S HAPPENING: After casting on and joining to work in the round, you discover your work has a spiral twist that can't be unknitted.

WHY IT HAPPENS: The cast-on stitches were twisted around the needle before joining — once you've knitted several rounds, the twist is locked in permanently.

HOW TO FIX IT:

- Prevention is everything: before joining, ensure ALL cast-on stitches face the SAME direction
- Lay the work on a flat surface and check that no stitches have jumped over the needle
- Work the first 3–4 rows FLAT (don't join) before joining seamlessly — this makes checking much easier
- If already twisted with multiple rounds worked: unfortunately, the only fix is frogging back to the cast-on

□ PRO TIP: Place a locking stitch marker on the first stitch AND lay the cast-on flat before joining. These 30 extra seconds save the entire project.

Problem #09: Yarn Tangling and Knotting

WHAT'S HAPPENING: Your yarn constantly tangles, knots itself, or creates 'yarn barf' every time you pull from the center of a ball.

WHY IT HAPPENS: Center-pull balls often have tangled cores. Working with two strands from the same ball without unwinding separately also creates spectacular tangles.

HOW TO FIX IT:

- Try pulling from the OUTSIDE of the ball instead of the center for some yarns
- Wind problematic skeins into center-pull cakes using a yarn swift and winder
- For two-color work: use separate balls of each color, kept in separate small bags
- Periodically let your work dangle and untwist — especially when working in the round

□ PRO TIP: A yarn bowl (or even a clean salad bowl) keeps your ball from rolling around and dramatically reduces tangling.

Problem #10: Colorwork Floats Puckering

WHAT'S HAPPENING: In stranded colorwork (Fair Isle/Norwegian), the fabric puckers and draws in dramatically, making it stiff and too small.

WHY IT HAPPENS: The 'floats' — strands of yarn carried behind the work between color changes — are pulled too tight, drawing the fabric inward like a gathered shirring.

HOW TO FIX IT:

- Spread stitches out on your needle before creating each float — physically stretch them
- Always strand floats over a finger to maintain loose tension
- Use a needle size LARGER than normal for colorwork — this forces the floats to be longer
- Never carry floats longer than 5 stitches without catching them against the working yarn

□ **PRO TIP:** Colorwork knit in the round is significantly easier to tension correctly than flat colorwork. If you're new to stranded knitting, start with a small circular project like a hat.

Problem #11: Increasing Incorrectly

WHAT'S HAPPENING: Your increases (M1, kfb, etc.) create holes you didn't want, or the stitch count isn't right, or the increases lean the wrong way.

WHY IT HAPPENS: Different increase methods behave differently. M1L and M1R are directional. KFB creates an extra 'bar' stitch. Choosing the wrong increase for the context is extremely common.

HOW TO FIX IT:

- M1L (make 1 left): lift bar between stitches from FRONT, knit through BACK — leans left
- M1R (make 1 right): lift bar between stitches from BACK, knit through FRONT — leans right
- KFB: creates a tiny horizontal bar on the right side — use where it's hidden in the design
- For raglan or symmetrical shaping: pair M1L with M1R on each side for mirror-image increases
- When pattern just says 'M1': use M1L as default, M1R at end of rows

□ **PRO TIP:** When your pattern says 'inc1' without specifying the method, look at photos of the finished item — if increases show, choose M1L/M1R (neater). If hidden in seaming, KFB is fine.

Problem #12: Seaming Looks Terrible

WHAT'S HAPPENING: Seaming your knitted pieces together creates a visible, bulky, or clunky join that looks nothing like the rest of the fabric.

WHY IT HAPPENS: The Mattress Stitch is the gold-standard seaming method for knitting but takes practice. Most beginners use a basic overcast seam that looks amateur.

HOW TO FIX IT:

- Use Mattress Stitch for all visible seams: work with RS facing, insert needle under 1 bar between edge and 2nd stitch on first piece, then 1 bar on second piece — zigzag up
- Use the same yarn as the knitting for invisible seams — or a thinner yarn in the same color for bulky projects
- Work seams loose at first, then tighten every inch or so — too tight creates rippling
- Press/block seams open after joining using a damp cloth — this opens up the join enormously

□ **PRO TIP:** Block your finished pieces BEFORE seaming — it's 10x easier to seam flat, blocked pieces than curled, unblocked ones. Blocking is the step most new knitters skip and most experienced knitters swear by.

When to Frog vs. When to Fix

'Frogging' means ripping back your knitting (named because you 'rip it, rip it' like a frog). Sometimes frogging is necessary — but sometimes a fix-in-place is faster and just as good.

Situation	FIX in place?	FROG back?
Dropped stitch in current row	YES — use crochet hook	Not needed
Twisted stitch 2 rows back	YES — drop stitch down, reknit up	Not needed
Accidental yarn over 1 row back	YES — drop it and reknit	Not needed
Wrong stitch 10+ rows back	MAYBE — use duplicate stitch to	Depends on visibility
Gauge was completely wrong	NO — fix before more rows are w	FROG NOW
Picked up wrong stitch count	MAYBE — add strategically placed	Depends on impact
Twist in cast-on join (1–2 rounds)	NO — you'll live with a spiral	FROG NOW
Knit when you should have purled (full row)	Consider — in some patterns, on	Frog if visible