



by *Sandi Rosner*

It is entirely possible to make a sweater without ever increasing or decreasing the number of stitches. Four plain rectangles can be sewn together to make a perfectly serviceable covering for your upper body and arms. Most of us, however, prefer our garments to bear some relationship to the shape of the body underneath. Producing such garments requires a working understanding of increases and decreases. In this article, we will take an in-depth look at increases. Look for the discussion of decreases in the Spring issue.

[Common Increases](#)

The first increase most knitters learn (often by mistake) is the **yarn over (yo)**. This simple technique creates a new stitch between two existing stitches. To make a yarn over, bring the yarn up across the front of the needle, over the top and down the back. If the next stitch is a knit, you are in position and good to go. If the next stitch is a purl, bring the yarn forward under the needle into position to purl.

Yarn Over



In this swatch, the yarn over is worked every fourth row.

Yarn overs are easy to work and won't disturb the stitches on either side of the new stitch, but they also create a hole in the fabric. Some knitters view this as an effective decorative detail. If you prefer your increases to be less apparent, you have lots of options. [See how to.](#)

Knit in the Front and Back of the Stitch



Knitting in the front and back of the stitch (kfb) turns one stitch into two. To work this increase, knit the stitch as usual, but don't drop it off the left-hand needle. Knit the stitch again through the back loop, and then drop it off the needle. [See how to.](#)

This increase creates a small bump on the face of the knitting to the left of the stitch where the increase was worked. Depending on the project you are making, this little bump can be a blemish or a decorative detail. Keep in mind that the bump will always be to the left of the original stitch. You'll see why this matters in a little bit when we talk about paired increases.

Make One



The increase most often used in contemporary knitting patterns is the **make one (M1)**. This increase can lean to the left (**M1L**) or to the right (**M1R**). If the direction is not specified, you can take your pick. Like the yarn over, the make one creates a new stitch between two existing stitches. This stitch is created by picking up the strand of yarn that runs between the stitch you just knit and the next stitch on the left-hand needle, giving it a twist, and knitting into this new loop. [See how to.](#)

To work a left-leaning make one, insert the left-hand needle, from front to back, under the strand of yarn which runs between the stitch just worked and the next stitch on the left-hand needle and knit this stitch through the back loop. To work a right-leaning make one, insert the left-hand needle, from back to front, under the strand of yarn which runs between the stitch just worked and the next stitch on the left-hand needle. Knit this stitch through the front loop.

The make one can cause a distortion of the stitches on either side of the increase. When you pick up the strand between the stitches and give it twist, you are pulling a small amount of yarn from the stitches on either side to make the new stitch.

Lifted Increase



In recent years, the **lifted increase** has gained in popularity. Like the make one, these increases are directional. You can make a right-leaning lifted increase (**RLI**) or a left-leaning lifted increase (**LLI**). [See how to.](#)

Before we work these increases, let's take a good look at a column of knit stitches. The stitch on the needle is the "child" stitch. The stitch the child comes out of is the "mother" stitch. The stitch the mother comes out of is the "grandmother" stitch. I first learned this generational naming system from Annie Modesitt, and I find it helpful and easy to remember. Both the mother and the grandmother stitches have "shoulders," one on the right and one on the left. Lifted increases are worked by knitting into these shoulders.

For a right-lifted increase, the next stitch on your left-hand needle is the child. To make the increase, knit into the right shoulder of the mother stitch. For a left-lifted increase, the stitch just worked on your right-hand needle is the child. To make the increase, knit into the left shoulder of the grandmother stitch.

Since they do not arise from a twisted loop, lifted increases are smooth and unobtrusive.

Two other increases, while seldom used, deserve mention here.

Eyelets



You can make an increase that creates an **eyelet** similar to that of the yarn over, but smaller. Simply insert the left-hand needle, from front to back, under the strand of yarn that runs between the stitch just worked and the next stitch on the left-hand needle; knit this stitch through the front loop. This increase is easy to work and produces a delicate openwork effect. [See how to.](#)

Twisted Yarn Over

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Finally, there is a variation on the make one increase that eliminates the distortion of the adjoining stitches. We'll call this the **twisted yarn over**. To make your twisted yarn over lean to the right, make a backwards yarn over. On the following row, purl this yarn over through the front loop. To make the twisted yarn over lean to the left, make a normal yarn over. On the following row, purl this yarn over through the back loop. In working these increases, you are using the yarn over to reserve the yarn that will form the twisted loop at the base of the increase. Because extra yarn has, in effect, been set aside, the twisted loop does not need to pull yarn from its neighbors. The drawback of these increases is that they are worked over two rows, requiring a bit more attention on the part of the knitter. [See how to.](#)

Paired Increases

Increases often travel in pairs, and these pairs are often lined up in precise arrangements, like couples at a dance. Paired increases are used for shaping the taper of a sleeve, for raglan lines on a top-down sweater, and for gusset increases on toe-up socks. Thoughtful selection of the type of increases you use and the symmetry of their placement can create a lovely design detail on your sweater.

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In the swatch below, increases are worked on every other row at either side of two central stitches. The paired yarn over increases would be a good choice for garments with lace or other openwork details.

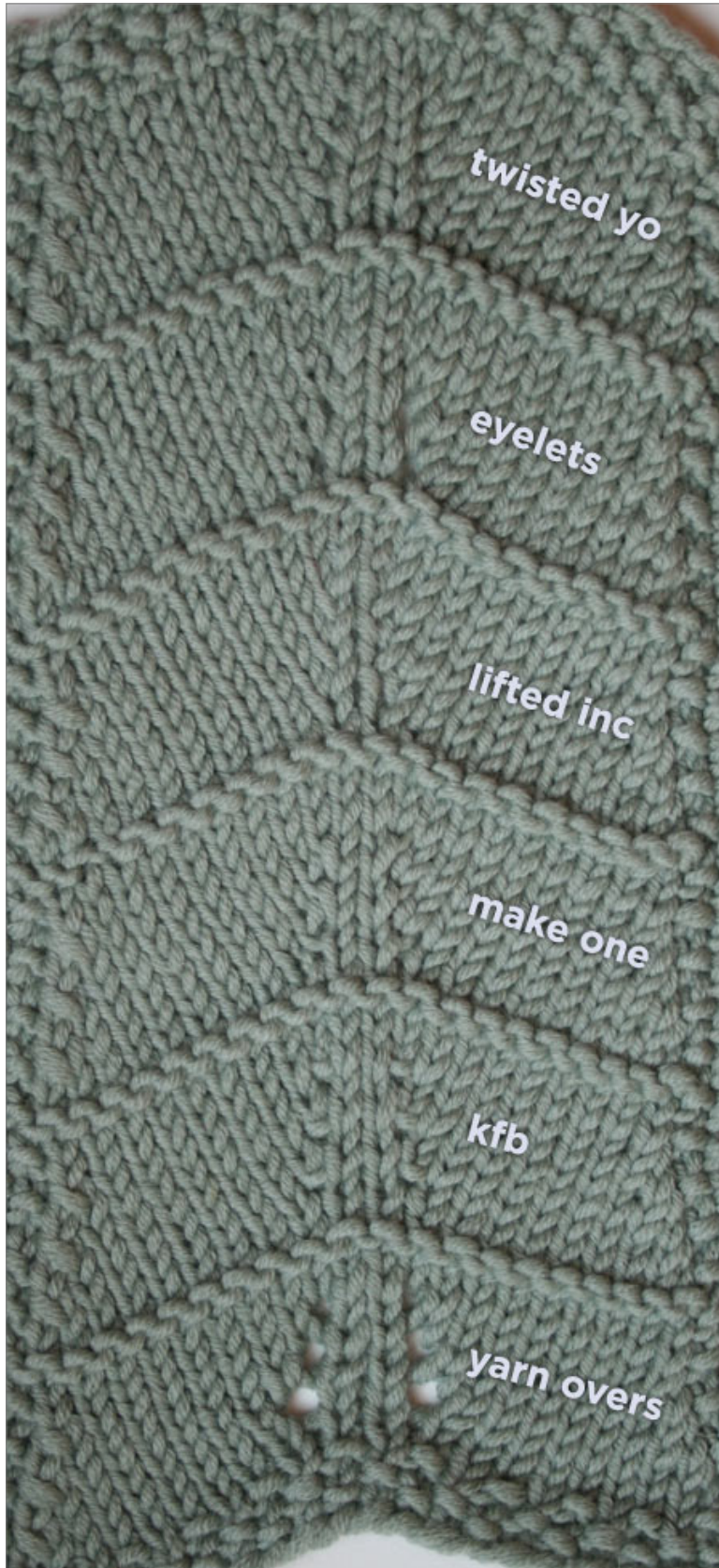
When working a pair of kfbs, only one stitch is worked between the two kfbs since the bump made by this increase is always to the left of the stitch. Knitting in the front of the stitch makes what looks like a normal knit stitch. Knitting in the back makes the bump. To produce the appearance of a bump on either side of two central stitches, you work kfb, knit 1, kfb.

Each of the pairs gives the increase lines a subtly different look.

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Knitter's Choice

Knitting patterns usually specify the type of increase to use, but you need not be limited by the designer's recommendation. It is, after all, your sweater. While you are making your gauge swatch, play around with different increases. See how they integrate with the stitch pattern, and experiment with the different looks created by changing the direction of the lean. Take advantage of your ability to make choices among many different techniques to produce the sweater you really want.

Increase How Tos:



[Yarn Overs](#)



[Knit in the Front and Back of the Stitch](#)



[Make 1 \(Left or Right\)](#)



[Lifted Increases \(Left or Right\)](#)



[Eyelets](#)



[Twisted Yarn Overs](#)

[Download a handy pdf with Increasing Your Options and instructions for all of the increases](#)

Sandi Rosner is a knitter who wears many hats: designer, technical editor, writer and teacher. She loves the little details that elevate a knitting project from homemade to handmade. Follow Sandi's blog at <http://www.knittinginwinecountry.blogspot.com>.