How to sew an adjustable chef’s apron
by compwalla on September 14, 2008

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**Intro: How to sew an adjustable chef’s apron**

This tutorial teaches you how to sew a chef's apron. As far as aprons go, it's pretty basic. What is different about it is the way the neck adjusts. Instead of strings that tie behind the neck or a neck that adjusts with a D-ring buckle, this one uses a single long tie that slides through casings at the armholes. You pull on the ends of the ties to slide the apron up or down as needed for each wearer.

Why this style? Because it's the style I like and it's easy for kids to adjust on their own. D-ring buckles have a way of coming undone when you least want them to. It's hard for a little kid to re-thread the end of the tie through them and a pain for their parents to do it for them. It's also easy to tie your hair inside the bow of tie-behind-the-neck aprons. If you're bald, this isn't really a problem but if you're not it hurts just as bad as back in second grade when that jerk Craig McKenna grabbed your braid as you were rounding first base during kickball.

"But a casing is hard!"

No, it isn't. Don't be a nancy. This pattern has only four pieces, three if you cheat and buy bias tape for the tie. Really, it is crazy-easy to make. You can use cute fabric to make a hostess apron or use matching fabric to make a parent-child pair of aprons. Use denim or a masculine print and you've got a great Father's Day present for the dad in your life. Add a pocket if you want, add rick-rack or trim or a heart-shaped lace pocket. The look of the finished apron is up to you. Be creative!

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**Image Notes**

1. This is sized to fit most adults and older kids.
2. This one is the child size. My three year old has one this size but he'll be able to wear through most of grade school.

**Step 1: Supply List**

To make the apron, you'll need to gather up your supplies:

Adult: 1 1/2 yards of pre-washed and ironed fabric, give or take. You can get by with a little less if you make a shorter tie. I like the tie to be long enough to cross in the back and wrap back around to the front to tie so I can tuck a dishtowel in there for handwiping and such. If you are ok with it tying in back, you'll only need about 1 1/4 yards.

Kid: 1 yard of pre-washed and ironed fabric. A little less if you want a shorter tie.

Paper to make your pattern, pins, thread, a big safety pin, and an iron.

Optional: a 1" bias tape maker, rotary cutter, acrylic ruler, self-healing mat.
Image Notes
1. Bias tape maker
2. I used heavy drapery fabric but you can use canvas, oilcloth, denim, or any other fabric you think will hold up to the punishment of the kitchen it's intended for. If you decide on denim or canvas, be sure and pick up some heavy-duty needles and go slow over the intersections when you're sewing.
3. Any translucent paper will work. By the way, translucent means you can see through it. I know at least some of you were going to have to go look that up so I saved you the trouble.

Step 2: Make the Pattern
To make the pattern, you can use any kind of translucent paper or tissue. I like parchment paper. If you're making a bunch of these, parchment holds up well. Use a pencil though since some kinds are coated and you can't draw on them with a pen or marker.

You're going to end up with two pattern pieces -- one will be the apron, one will be for the casing. Start with the apron. Measure out the dimensions onto the paper and then draw in a nice curve for the armhole.

Now you need to make the pattern for the casing. Measure in two inches from the arm curve and mark it with dots several places along the way. Connect the dots so you've got a consistent two inches all the way along the curve. This is the shape of the casing piece you're going to need for the tie to slide through. If you're using parchment paper or other transparent paper for your pattern, place another sheet over your pattern and trace the curved boomerang shape. You can tape it to a big window or a sliding door during the day to make the lines more visible.

Now cut out the pattern pieces. You should have two pieces of pattern paper now, one apron piece and one casing piece. Make sure when you cut the apron out that you cut along the very outside edge. Do not cut off the piece with the casing drawn on it.

NOTE: If you really don't have a single piece of paper you can see through, using wrapping paper or other paper you can't see through, slip the second piece under the apron pattern, trace around the apron pattern, and the measure two inches in on the casing pattern piece. Make sure you cut along the OUTSIDE edge of the apron pattern.
1. This is shown in miniature because it was easier to photograph. You will trace your pattern actual size. Tape the pattern to a window or sliding door to make a giant tracing box.

1. If you don’t have translucent paper, cut out the apron pattern first then trace around the outside edge onto another piece of paper.

1. Measure in two inches all the way down
2. connect the dots and cut out your casing pattern
Step 3: Cut out your fabric

Fold the fabric and pin the long end of your apron pattern along the fold. Depending on what width of fabric you have, it might save you fabric if don’t fold it exactly in half. Play around with the arrangement to minimize waste. Pin your casing piece down as close to the edge as possible but make sure you pin it where there are two layers of fabric since you’re going to cut through both layers to make two casing pieces, a left and a right. Cut around your pattern pieces through both layers of the fabric.

Unpin the pattern paper. Unfold the apron piece. Now you should have three cut pieces of fabric: a left casing, a right casing, and the big apron piece.

Image Notes
1. You see how the apron pattern still shows the casing on there? It should. Cut along the outside line, not the inside line. Your pattern pieces should look like this when you’re done.

2. Once again, notice the line you drew for the casing is still a part of the apron pattern. Drawing the casing on the pattern was so you could match the curve of the armhole. Please tell me you get that by now.

2. I put the casing piece close to the edge because this extra fabric is what we’re going to cut into strips to make the tie. You could plop that casing pattern down right...
smack in the middle here but that would make you wasteful -- not to mention inattentive.

**Step 4: You want me to what?**
This is one of those steps that makes you scratch your head and wonder, "Why is she having me do this now? This woman is crazy." I've made a dozen or so of these and I just figured out after number ten that doing this step now cuts the ass-ache factor of the casing just about in half. So take back what you said and follow the directions.

Take your curved casing pieces and move over to the iron. There are two sides to the curved piece, the short inside part and the long outside part. Just like at a racetrack. Fold the long outside part in about 1/4 to 3/8 of an inch and press that down. It will be kind of tricky to get the fold an even width all the way along that curve but do your best. It's a whole lot trickier if you've already got it sewn to the apron and I managed to do it that way ten times already. This is the easy way. No whining allowed.

A note about pressing: for the love of FSM, don't skip any of it. If you don’t have an iron, stop now and go get one. If you're going to do any sewing at all, an iron is as essential a tool as a needle. Pressing is the difference between something that looks hand-crafted and something that looks like it was made by your drunken auntie after her box of wine started running low.

![Image Notes](http://www.instructables.com/id/How-to-sew-an-adjustable-chefs-apron/)

- Fold it wrong sides together.

**Step 5: Sew on the casing**
Take your curved pieces back to the apron and line them up along the armholes, right sides together. Pin in place and sew them down along that inside curve. Fold them open press the seams just a little. It will be curving the wrong way, I know, but you want to flatten that bump out just a little before the next step.

![Image Notes](http://www.instructables.com/id/How-to-sew-an-adjustable-chefs-apron/)

- You want to use a narrow seam allowance, no more than 3/8". You have to leave a decent space to let the casing slide through.
1. Press this open as best you can. Eventually it's going to be folded over to the back.

1. It won't look smooth and nice because the curves aren't matched up right now. Don't stress.
Step 6: Hem the top and sides

Next we’ll hem the top and sides of the apron. The top is the trickiest part so let’s get that done first. The curved pieces will be sticking up like little horns but that is what we want since these will get folded in and sewn down and they won’t stick up weird after that. Fold it in and check for yourself if you don’t believe me.

We’re going to do a double fold along the top so head over to the iron. Fold over the raw edge once - about 3/8 to 1/2” ought to do it - and press it down. It’s going to be hard to get the obtuse angle at the intersection Folded just right but you don’t need to obsess too much over it. Just try to get it as smooth and even as possible. If you don’t know what the obtuse angle is, go look it up. I’m not a math teacher; I’m just here to teach you how to make an apron. Fold it over again and press it down. Do the same for the side seams. Pin those down and sew close to the inside of the fold. You could get all fancy and use a blind hem stitch but we’re making an apron here, not a wedding dress.

Image Notes
1. You’ll have to unfold a bit of the casing you already creased to get the top hem done.
1. This part with the seam will be awkward because the casing joins at an angle. Do your best even if your best is a C-

**Image Notes**

1. stitch close to the fold

**Step 7: Finish the casing**

Now to finish the casing. Now that the sides and top are hemmed, go back to the iron, fold the casing over to the wrong side of the apron, and press. You can see what’s coming can’t you? Imagine trying to press in that tiny fold on the outside curve of the casing now. It would be a major PITA, wouldn’t it? Aren’t you glad the fold is already pressed in there and all you have to do is pin it down? I know you are. So go do it.

Sew as close to the edge as you can. The space in between your inside and outside seams is the tunnel where the apron tie will slide so you want to ensure that space is at least 3/4” wide because our tie is going to be 1/2” wide.

The top of the apron should be completely done now. If it’s not, you screwed it up. Go back and try to straighten that mess out.

**Image Notes**

1. See how this isn’t perfectly even? And yet the earth still spins. This will be on the inside of the apron and no one will see it.

1. The seam line is on the back side of the apron. It just looks neater that way.

1. See this little raw edge sticking up? We can clip it off so it won’t be seen.

1. clip at a 45 degree angle
Step 8: Hem the bottom
Fold up the bottom hem like we did the sides and top with a double fold to hide the raw edge. Clip the corners if you need to. Pin and sew that down. We’re almost done!

Step 9: Cut and join the strips to make the tie
Now we start the tie. Take what’s left of your fabric and cut it into 2 1/4” strips along the longest length you’ve got. I use a rotary cutter and acrylic ruler to make this faster but you can use a regular ruler and scissors. Just try to make them as even as possible.

Depending on how much fabric is left and how you laid out your pattern, your strips could be any length. Just figure out what length they are and cut enough of them to make the length of tie you want. To make the longer tie that wraps back around front, you’ll need 132” total of 2 1/4” strips. For a child size, you’ll need 96” of strips. For a shorter tie which will tie in the back, measure around the waist of the intended owner and decrease the length needed by that many inches. I know it’s math but it’s just subtraction.

Take two strips and join them together by laying them at right angles, right sides together. Draw a little pencil line from corner to corner and sew along that line. Cut off the triangle to the right leaving a 1/4” seam allowance. Go to the iron and press the seams open. You should now have a longer strip joined by a seam going across at a 45 degree angle. Why do it this way? You still don’t trust me, do you? Really, the reason we do it this way is so the stress on the seam is spread out over the length of the bias tape and not concentrated in one spot. Once it’s folded and sewn down, it’s not going anywhere. Keep joining your strips this way until you get to the right length.

A little note here: I am a quilter and there are uptight purists out there who say that bias tape must be cut from strips cut on the bias and if you don’t, you’re doing it wrong and the earth itself will stop rotating if you cut those strips along the grain and if it was up to them, they’d storm your house DEA-style with a no-knock raid and haul away your sewing machine and all your fabric while your family screams in terror. To them I say, “Go play on the freeway.” That’s not really what I say but I’m not dropping the eff bomb in a family tutorial.

Image Notes
1. The pencil line will help you sew straight since it's hard to see where you're headed while you're sewing.

Image Notes
1. Seam after sewing

Image Notes
1. Press this open.
Step 10: Make the bias tape

You've got one long strip of fabric now that we need to turn into bias tape. I use a handy little doohickey called a bias tape maker because I'm a modern person and I like using technology to make my life easier. But you can do it the hard way; it will just take a little more time. You probably start your barbecue by rubbing two sticks together so this will seem easy in comparison. I also found a neat DIY Bias Tape Maker online if you prefer.

Bias tape looks like a bent staple from the side. The sides are folded in to meet in the middle with a little space left down the center. You can follow the directions on the tape maker if you have one or you can fold the tape by hand which isn't really as hard as it sounds. You just need to give it a good start by folding it in and pressing it down. Once you get it going, you can slide the iron along with your smart hand and use the fingers on your stupid hand to guide the folds. There I go with the dam iron again but you're sewing which is quaintly retro and reminiscent of the days when people wore silk and linen and not poly and ester. It's an old-school tool that hasn't been improved upon.

To finish the tie, fold the bias tape in half again and iron it down. That's why you left the little space in the center, like in a side view of a spent staple. You needed the space to allow for the last fold. Now your bias tape should be four layers thick and about 1/2" wide.

We need to sew it down but before we do that, unfold the ends, square them off, fold in about 1/4" and sew the raw edge down. Clip the corners if you need to.

Now take the long tape over to the sewing machine and sew pretty close to the edge. You may need to pin but I like to live dangerously and just guide the fabric under the presser foot with my fingers. I've been doing this a while though, so if you're nervous, go ahead and pin. Won't hurt and might help.

Now that we're done, I maybe should tell you that you can actually purchase bias tape already made. You just take it out of the package, fold it in half, and sew it down. It won't be made of the same fabric as your apron but it will work.
Step 11: This one goes to eleven

Last step is to thread the tie through the casing. The safety pin is the star of this show. Poke the pin through the end of your tie and use it as a guide to thread it up one casing and down the other.

Holy Cow! You’re done! You’ve made an apron. Wear your apron with pride as you whip up home cooked delicacies for your family and friends. They will be in awe of both your style and culinary skills. Or you can wear it while you slide frozen entrees out of the box and into their microwave-safe containers. But trust me, your guests will know if you do.

Image Notes
1. They make tools to thread things through casings but since this casing is so short and wide, a big safety pin is the easy and economical choice.

Related Instructables
- The Pirate Chef: Cooking Apron and Hat by Toglefritz
- Kid Craft – Kids Pocket Apron by DebH57
- Forget me not utility apron with timer, sewuseful! by minmade
- Jeans Apron by Very Interesting
- Waterproof Tablecloth Apron by heidewickersham
- Kilt with Sash by mrmucax

arielanine says:
I followed the tutorial to make my mom a christmas present, it turned out great!

compwalla says:
It looks terrific! Glad she liked it. :)

delavega says:
I needed an apron pattern for a project I am doing with a bunch of teenage girls who are learning to sew. I made my sample apron yesterday and it turned out great. BTW, thank you for your creative writing style. (you sound like me) It made me laugh, especially when I was about to complain very loudly, I would continue to read and LOL! Thanks for the comic relief, you made this experience fun.
From: a person who hates to sew.

c_bluesky says:
Thank you for this tutorial. I rather like your teaching style -- clear, to the point, and no bs.

sarahfish says:
great project, great inst!
Also, first time I've seen the tape maker, wow, all the time I've wasted doing it by hand!!! So cool!

kaleevt says:
I made two of these aprons for Christmas and the recipients loved them. I made one change that cut project time to 20 minutes! Cut 2 apron panels for each apron. Pin right sides together and sew together leaving 5 openings as follows: 1.25" at each end of the apron top; 1.25" at the top of each straight edge after the curve, and 3" on the bottom hem. With a needle and thread, handsew the fabric around the first four openings down so that the edge is smooth. Turn the apron out through the gap on the bottom. Topstick the channels for the adjustable tie from one end of the top opening to the corresponding end of the opening after the curve. This allows a sturdier, self-lined apron that better protects their clothing if you are using lighter weight cotton (I used leftover cotton from my quilting stash to make two children's aprons this way).

smilemeg says:
This was a great tutorial! It was really easy to follow and really helped a novice sewer like myself! The apron I made came out great! I'm giving it to my dad for Christmas!! Thanks so much!

2Marbles says:
Excellent! I finished it last week, and will take pictures as promised! You made this sooooo easy! Thanks for the Christmas gift idea!

compwalla says:
Yay! Can't wait to see it. :)

JennasMommy says:
Love it! This is one of the most well written tutorials I have ever seen...you get an A++. Thank you so much for adding the PDF download, it makes my life as a TUT-junky so much easier :). I can't wait to make one of these for my toddler to go with her new play kitchen! Thanks ~Mary
artmule says:
I love the print to that fabric