

Jeans

Jeans are a type of [pants](#) or trousers made from [denim](#) or [dungaree](#) cloth. Often the term "jeans" refers to a particular style of trousers, called "blue jeans", with copper-riveted pockets which were invented by [Jacob W. Davis](#) in 1871^[1] and patented by Jacob W. Davis and [Levi Strauss](#) on May 20, 1873. Prior to the patent, the term "blue jeans" had been long in use for various garments (including trousers, overalls, and coats), constructed from blue-colored denim.^[2]



A pair of jeans



Microscopic image of faded fabric

"Jean" also references a (historic) type of sturdy cloth commonly made with a cotton warp and wool weft (also known as "Virginia cloth"). Jean cloth can be entirely cotton as well, similar to denim. Originally designed for [miners](#), modern jeans were popularized as casual wear by [Marlon Brando](#) and [James Dean](#) in their 1950s films, particularly *[The Wild One](#)* and *[Rebel Without a Cause](#)*,^[3] leading to the fabric becoming a symbol of rebellion among teenagers, especially members of the [greaser](#) subculture. From the 1960s onwards, jeans became common among various youth subcultures and subsequently young members of the general population. Nowadays, they are one of the most popular types of specialty trousers in [Western culture](#). Historic brands include [Levi's](#), [Lee](#), and [Wrangler](#).

History

Fabric



A traditional women's Genoese dress in "blue jeans" (1890s). *Palazzo Spinola di Pellicceria, Genoa, Italy.*

Research on the trade of jean fabric shows that it emerged in the cities of [Genoa](#), Italy, and [Nîmes](#), France. Gênes, the French word for [Genoa](#), may be the origin of the word "jeans". In Nîmes, weavers tried to reproduce jean fabric but instead developed a similar [twill](#) fabric that became known as denim, "*de Nîmes*", meaning "from Nîmes". Genoa's jean fabric was a [fustian](#) textile of "medium quality and of reasonable cost", very similar to cotton [corduroy](#) for which Genoa was famous, and was "used for work clothes in general". The [Genoese navy](#) equipped its sailors with jeans, as they needed a fabric which could be worn wet or dry.^{[4][5]} Nîmes's "denim" was coarser, considered higher quality, and was used "for over garments such as smocks or overalls".^{[6]:23} In 1576 a quantity of "jean fustians" arrived into the port of Barnstaple on a vessel from Bristol.^[7] Nearly all [indigo](#), needed for dyeing, came from indigo bush plantations in India until the late 19th century. It was replaced by indigo synthesis methods developed in Germany.^[8]



Copper rivets for reinforcing pockets are a characteristic feature of blue jeans.

By the 17th century, jean was a crucial textile for working-class people in Northern Italy. This is seen in a series of genre paintings from around the 17th century attributed to an artist now nicknamed The Master of the Blue Jeans.^{[6]:10} The ten paintings depict impoverished scenes with lower-class figures wearing a fabric that looks like denim. The fabric would have been Genoese jean, which was cheaper. Genre painting came to prominence in late 16th century, and the non-nobility subject matter in all ten paintings places them among others that portray similar scenes.^[9]

Dungaree was mentioned for the first time in the 17th century, when it was referred to as cheap, coarse thick cotton cloth, often colored blue but sometimes white, worn by impoverished people in what was then a region of [Bombay](#), India a dockside village called Dongri. This cloth was "dungri" in [Hindi](#). Dungri was exported to England and used for manufacturing of cheap, robust working clothes. In English, the word "dungri" became pronounced as "dungaree".^[10]

Rivets



Jacob Davis

Levi Strauss

The term *jeans* appears first in 1795, when a Swiss banker by the name [Jean-Gabriel Eynard](#) and his brother Jacques went to Genoa and both were soon heading a flourishing commercial concern. In 1800 [Massena's](#) troops entered the town and Jean-Gabriel was entrusted with their supply. In particular he furnished them with uniforms cut from blue cloth called "bleu de Genes" whence later derives the famous garment known worldwide as "blue jeans".^[11]

[Levi Strauss](#), as a young man in 1851, went from Germany to New York to join his older brothers who ran a goods store. In 1853, he moved to San Francisco to open his own dry goods business. [Jacob Davis](#) was a tailor who often bought bolts of cloth from the [Levi Strauss & Co.](#) wholesale house. In 1872, Davis wrote to Strauss asking to partner with him to patent and sell clothing reinforced with [rivets](#).^[12] The copper rivets were to reinforce the points of stress, such as pocket corners and at the bottom of the button fly. Strauss accepted Davis's offer,^[13] and the two men received US patent No. 139,121 for an "Improvement in Fastening Pocket-Openings" on May 20, 1873.^[14]



Davis and Strauss experimented with different fabrics. An early attempt was brown [cotton duck](#), a bottom-weight fabric.^[a] Finding denim a more suitable material for work-pants, they began using it to manufacture their riveted pants. The denim used was produced by an American manufacturer. Popular legend incorrectly states that it was imported from [Nimes](#), France. A popular myth is that Strauss initially sold brown canvas pants to miners, later dyed them blue, turned to using denim, and only after Davis wrote to him, added rivets.^[12]

Initially, Strauss's jeans were simply sturdy trousers worn by [factory workers](#), miners, farmers, and cattlemen throughout the North American West.^{[15][16]} During this period, men's jeans had the [fly](#) down the front, whereas women's jeans had the fly down the left side.^[17] When [Levi Strauss & Co.](#) patented the modern, mass-produced prototype in the year 1873, there were two pockets in the front and one on the back right with copper rivets.^[11] The small riveted watch pocket was first added by Levi Strauss to their jeans in the late 1870s.^[18]

20th century evolution

In 1901 Levi Strauss added the back left pocket to their 501 model.^[19] This created the now familiar and industry standard five pocket configuration with two large pockets and small watch pocket in front with two pockets on the rear.

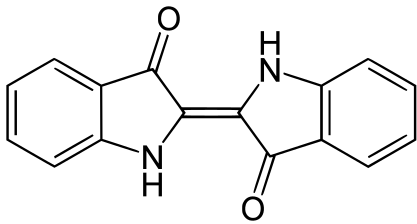
Fewer jeans were made during [World War II](#), but 'waist overalls' were introduced to the world by US soldiers, who sometimes wore them off duty.^{[20][21]} By the 1960s, both men's and women's jeans had the [zipper](#) down the front. Historic photographs indicate that in the decades before they became a staple of fashion, jeans generally fit quite loosely, much like a pair of [bib overalls](#) without the bib. Indeed, until 1960, Levi Strauss called its flagship product "waist overalls" rather than "jeans".

After [James Dean](#) popularized them in the movie *[Rebel Without a Cause](#)*, wearing jeans became a symbol of youth rebellion during the 1950s.^{[22][23]} During the 1960s the wearing of jeans became more acceptable, and by the 1970s it had become general fashion in the United States for casual wear.^[24] In Japan in 1977, a professor of [Osaka University](#) Philip Karl Pehda chastised a female student wearing jeans in the classroom. Then he was protested by the students, and a controversy arose in the country.^{[25][26]}

Examples of intentional denim distressing strictly to make them more fashionable can be seen as early as 1935 in Vogue's June issue.^[27] Michael Belluomo, editor of *Sportswear International Magazine*, Oct/Nov 1987, p. 45, wrote that in 1965, Limbo, a boutique in the New York East Village, was "the first retailer to wash a new pair of jeans to get a used, worn effect, and the idea became a hit." He continued, "[Limbo] hired East Village artists to embellish the jeans with patches, decals, and other touches, and sold them for \$200." In the early 1980s the denim industry introduced the [stone-washing](#) technique developed by GWG also known as "Great Western Garment Co." Donald Freeland of [Edmonton, Alberta](#) pioneered the method,^[28] which helped to bring denim to a larger and more versatile market. Acceptance of jeans continued through the 1980s and 1990s. Originally a utilitarian garment, jeans became a common fashion choice in the second half of the 20th century.^[29]

Manufacturing processes

Dyeing



Chemical structure of [indigo dye](#), the blue of blue jeans

Traditionally, jeans were [dyed](#) to a blue color using natural [indigo dye](#). Most denim is now dyed using synthetic indigo. Approximately 20 thousand tons of indigo are produced annually for this purpose, though only a few grams of the dye are required for each pair.^[30] For other colors of denim other dyes must be used. Currently, jeans are produced in any color that can be achieved with cotton.

For more information on dyeing, refer to [denim](#) and the discussion there of using pigment dyes.

Pre-shrinking



Crowd of people wearing a variety of jean styles, including [carpenter jeans](#), [bootcut jeans](#), [drainpipe jeans](#) and [lowrise jeans](#) (Rome, 2008)

In 1962 Levi Strauss introduced their own pre-shrunk jeans (Lee and Wrangler jeans had already long been pre-shrunk); these did not shrink further after purchase, allowing the consumer to purchase a correctly fitting size. Pre-shrink is most common in jeans nowadays.^[31] These jeans were known as the 505 regular fit jeans. The 505s are almost identical to the 501s with the exception of the button-fly. The Levi's Corporation also introduced a slim boot-cut fit known as 517 and 527. The difference between the two is that the 517s sit at the waist line and the 527s sit below the waist line. Later, Levi's would develop other styles and fits such as the loose, slim, comfort, relaxed, skinny, and a regular fit with a tapered leg.

Used and distressed looks



Ronald Reagan wearing stonewash denim associated with [Western clothing](#), 1970s

The used or "[acid wash](#)" look is created by means of abrading the jeans or treating them with chemicals, such as acryl resin, phenol, a hypochlorite, potassium permanganate, caustic soda, acids etc.^[32]

Ripping or [distressing](#) of jeans, though also arising naturally as a result of wear and tear, is sometimes deliberately performed by suppliers—with distressed clothing sometimes selling for more than a nondistressed pair. For example, [Pucci](#) sold "embellished mid-rise boyfriend jeans" for £600 (US\$860).^[33]

Sandblasting or abrading with sandpaper

Consumers wanting jeans that appear worn can buy jeans that have been specially treated. To give the fabrics the worn look, [sandblasting done with chemicals or by adding pumice stone to the washing process](#) or abrading with sandpaper is often done.

Environmental and humanitarian impact

A typical pair of blue jeans uses 3,479 litres (919 US gal) of water during its life cycle. This includes the water to irrigate the cotton crop, manufacture the jeans, and the numerous washes by the consumer.^[34] During production, the typical amount for washing with traditional Pullman machines reaches 90 litres per jeans, which can be reduced to about 27 litres using modern frontloaders.^[35] Novel washing processes such as Droptima can reduce that to 6 litres fresh water plus 4 litres used water.^{[35][36][37][38]}

The production of jeans with a "used look" can be more environmentally damaging than regular jeans, depending on how the waste compounds are processed. Sandblasting and treating with sandpaper has the risk of causing [silicosis](#) to the workers, and in Turkey, more than 5,000 textile workers have been stricken with this disease, and 46 people are known to have died. Some companies have announced they are banning the use of sandblasting.^[39]

Care and wear

Despite most jeans being "pre-shrunk", they are still sensitive to slight further shrinkage and loss of color from being washed. The Levi Strauss company recommends avoiding washing jeans as much as possible. Carl Chiara, Levi Strauss director of brand and special projects, has a credo: The less you wash your jeans, the better your jeans become.^[40] These and other suggestions to avoid washing jeans where possible have encountered criticism. Cory Warren, editor of *LS&Co. Unzipped*, clarifies in a response to such a criticism:

Our advice is to wash less often, but clearly, you have to judge for yourself what's appropriate. Hot day, dirty job? Wash your jeans. Please! Cold day, office job? Maybe you can wear them twice or more before they go back to the washing machine. Personally, if I wear a pair of jeans to work on Friday—cool climate, office job—I tend to wear them on Saturday. And if Saturday is spent indoors and I'm not spilling food all over myself, I might even wear them on Sunday.

— Corey Warren^[40]

For those who prefer to refrain from washing their jeans there have been suggestions to freeze them in order to kill the germs that cause odor. However, this advice has been proven ineffective.^[41]

Legal cases

Italian rape trial

In [Rome](#), Italy, in 1992, a 45-year-old driving instructor was accused of rape. When he picked up an 18-year-old girl for her first driving lesson, he allegedly raped her for an hour, then told her that if she was to tell anyone he would kill her. Later that night she told her parents and her parents agreed to help her press charges. While the alleged rapist was convicted and sentenced, the [Italian Court of Cassation](#) overturned the conviction in 1998 because the victim wore tight jeans. It was argued that she must have necessarily had to help her attacker remove her jeans, thus making the act [consensual](#) ("because the victim wore very, very tight jeans, she had to help him remove them... and by removing the jeans... it was no longer rape but consensual sex"). The court stated in its decision "it is a fact of common experience that it is nearly impossible to slip off tight jeans even partly without the active collaboration of the person who is wearing them."^[42]

The ruling sparked widespread feminist protest. The day after the decision, women in the [Italian Parliament](#) protested by wearing jeans and holding placards that read "Jeans: An Alibi for Rape". As a sign of support, the [California Senate](#) and the [California Assembly](#) followed suit. [Patricia Giggans](#), the executive director of the Los Angeles Commission on Assaults Against Women (now Peace Over Violence) soon made [Denim Day](#) an annual event. As of 2011 at least 20 U.S. states officially recognize Denim Day in April. Wearing jeans on that day has become an international symbol of protest against such attitudes about sexual assault. As of 2008, the court has overturned its findings, and there is no longer a "denim" defense to the charge of rape.^[42]

Rokotov-Faibishenko case

In 1957, during the [6th World Festival of Youth and Students](#) held in [Moscow, Soviet Union](#) (present-day [Russia](#)), Western-made jeans were first introduced to the communist state and sparked "jeans fever" at the time. People preferred to wear Western-made blue jeans rather than local-made black ones. In Soviet ideology, such an action challenged communist-made jeans and symbolized Western victory. In 1961, two ringleaders, Y. T. Rokotov and V. P. Faibishenko, were caught with their group for smuggling currencies from other countries along with blue jeans and other contrabands. Under the leadership of [Nikita Khrushchev](#), the duo was executed.

Trends

Worldwide market for jeans

North America accounts for 39% of global purchases for jeans, followed by Western Europe at 20%, Japan and Korea at 10% and the rest of the world at 31%.^[43]

United States consumers spent more than US\$14 billion on jeans in 2004 and US\$15 billion in 2005.^[11] US consumers bought US\$13.8 billion of men's and women's jeans in the year that ended April 30, 2011, according to market-research firm NPD Group.^[44]

Soviet Union

In the [Soviet Union](#), jeans were the symbol of the Western way of life. The "jeans fever" in the USSR started in 1957 during the [World Festival of Youth and Students](#).^[45] According to a 1961 Soviet textile dictionary, jeans were initially referred to as a "worker's uniform" (*рабочий костюм, rabochii kostyum*).^[46]

The jeans brand Rokotov and Fainberg is named after the defendants in the Rokotov–Faibishenko case, Yan T. Rokotov and Vladislav P. Faibishenko, who were executed for, among other things, trafficking in jeans.^[45]

Although not outright banned, jeans were hard to come by in the Soviet Union since they were seen as a symbol of rebellion by the Soviet youth, who wanted to emulate the style of film and rock stars of the West. The [Soviet government](#) resisted supplying the market with jeans as it would mean responding to the [market](#), a [capitalist](#) principle.^[47] People went to great lengths, sometimes by resorting to violence and other illegal activities, to obtain real Western-made jeans. That led to the creation of [black markets](#) and to the [bootlegging](#) of jeans, which since has become an important cultural element of the [history of the Soviet Union](#).^[48]

Market-share shift to activewear

In 2014, teens were buying more fashion and [athleisure](#) clothing from brands such as [Nike](#) and [Lululemon](#) over denim classics from brands like [Abercrombie & Fitch](#).^[49] [Activewear](#) in 2014 comprised 28% of teens' apparel purchases, up from 6% in 2008. In 2014, Nike, Lululemon, [Under Armour](#), and [Adidas](#) were the most popular brands for athletic apparel among teen consumers.

Fashion retailers have begun to adjust their offerings accordingly. Bloomberg reports that Levi's stuck to its core product (denim) instead of adapting to consumer trends. As a result, Levi's sales decreased from over US\$7 billion to US\$4.8 billion in 2015.^[50]

In February 2021, it was found that sales for [athleisure](#) had risen by 84% since March 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 lockdowns.^[51]

Variations on the basic type

- Cigarette: Designed to fit quite closely, but not tightly, to the thigh area, with a less close fit to the calf.^[52]
- Cropped: Where the leg is cut to a lesser length, to somewhere above the ankle.^[52]
- Relaxed^[52]
- Skinny: Worn to flatter the figure in the fashion of tight or close fitting.^[52]
- Wide-leg; or with cropped variant: The waist line rides up past the wearer's actual waist, material below the knee is altogether away from the leg and descends as a straight line, standard type descends down to the ankle; cropped variant: the leg ceases at the lower leg mid-way down (or stops further down toward the ankle).^[52]
- Mom: Jeans which have a high waist (above the belly button), and are loose around the thighs, with a somewhat tapered fit.^[53]
- Straight-leg: Jeans which are the same width at the leg opening as they are at the bottom of the leg, making for a slightly baggy fit.^[54]
- Boyfriend: Often with a mid-low waist, boyfriend jeans have a baggy, "borrowed from the boys" fit.^[53]
- Flared, or bell-bottomed: Often fitted around the thigh area, then become wider from the knee down.^[55]

Distressed jeans



Ripped jeans

Distressed denim emerged from the cultural [punk](#) movement in the 1970s. Early punks tore apart consumer goods as an expression of their anger towards society.^[56] Denim became a key target of this politically fueled deconstruction, with both men and women donning torn pants and jackets, accessorized with safety pins and slogans. The trend became popular again in the 1990s with the emergence of [grunge](#) fashion. The grunge youth wore loose-fitting ripped jeans, flannel shirts or woolen [Pendletons](#) layered over T-shirts. Their anti-conformist approach to fashion led to the popularization of the casual chic look, a trend which continued into the 2000s.

Low-rise jeans



Example of a boy with sagging

Media reported in 2017 that the trend of [low-rise jeans](#), famous in 1990s and 2000s as [sagging](#), was coming back into fashion due to celebrities like [Justin Bieber](#) endorsing it.^[57]

Low-rise jeans are usually worn 2–3 inches (5–8 cm) or more below the navel.^[58]



Gwen Stefani wearing low-rise jeans in the early 2000s while performing

In the early 2000s, low-rise jeans were commonly seen on celebrities such as [Jennifer Lopez](#), [Paris Hilton](#), [Gwen Stefani](#) and [Christina Aguilera](#), attributing to the Y2K style. In 2021, online searches for 'y2k fashion' had risen by 193%,^[59] showing that the fashion style was making a comeback, and low-rise jeans were becoming a common clothing item for teenagers and young adults.^{[60][61][62]}

Industrial production



How denim fabric is stored in the factory



Automated cutting machines are used in RMG factory to cut the pieces.



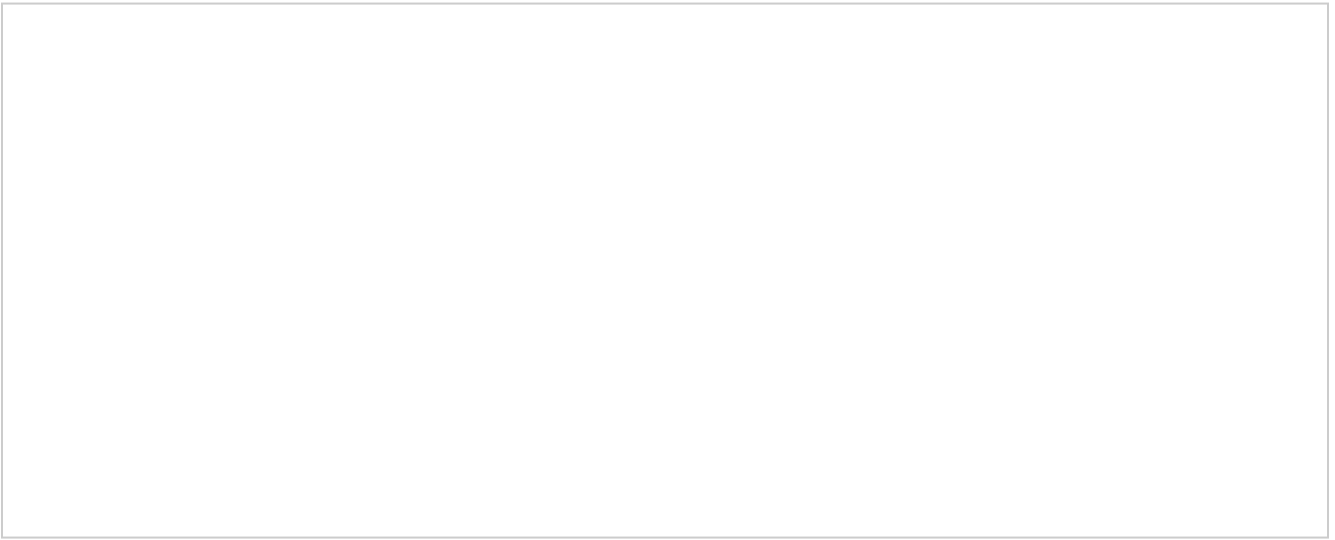
P P Spray and P P Sponging being applied to jeans to give them a new look

Adding 3D crunching, whiskers, and wrinkles to jeans to make them look more used

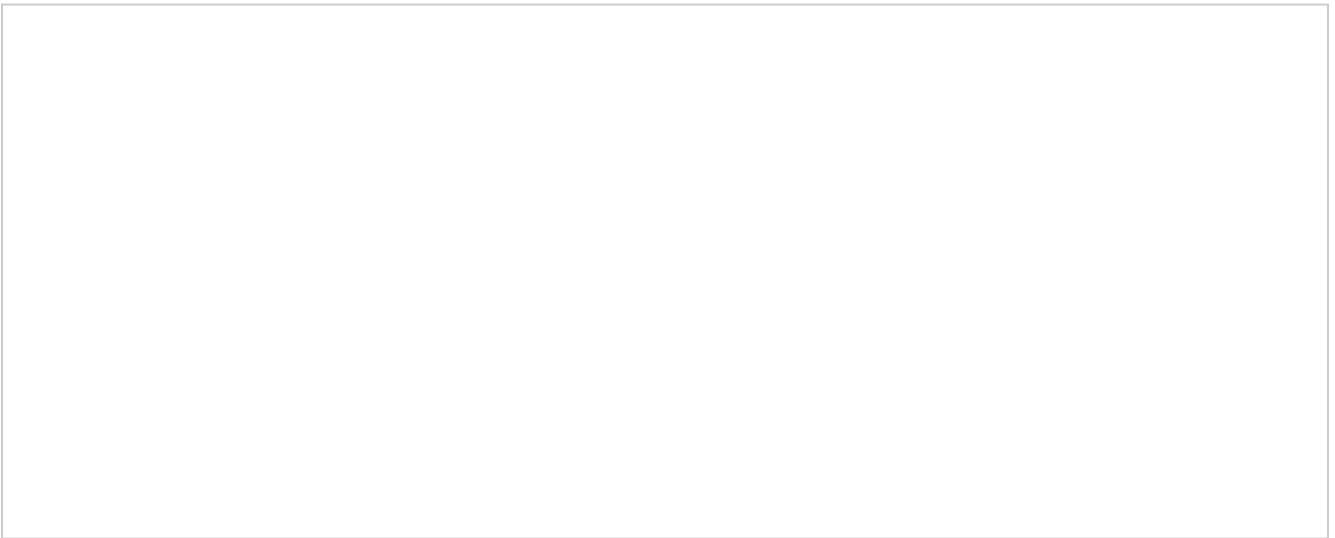


Applying permanent wrinkles to jeans

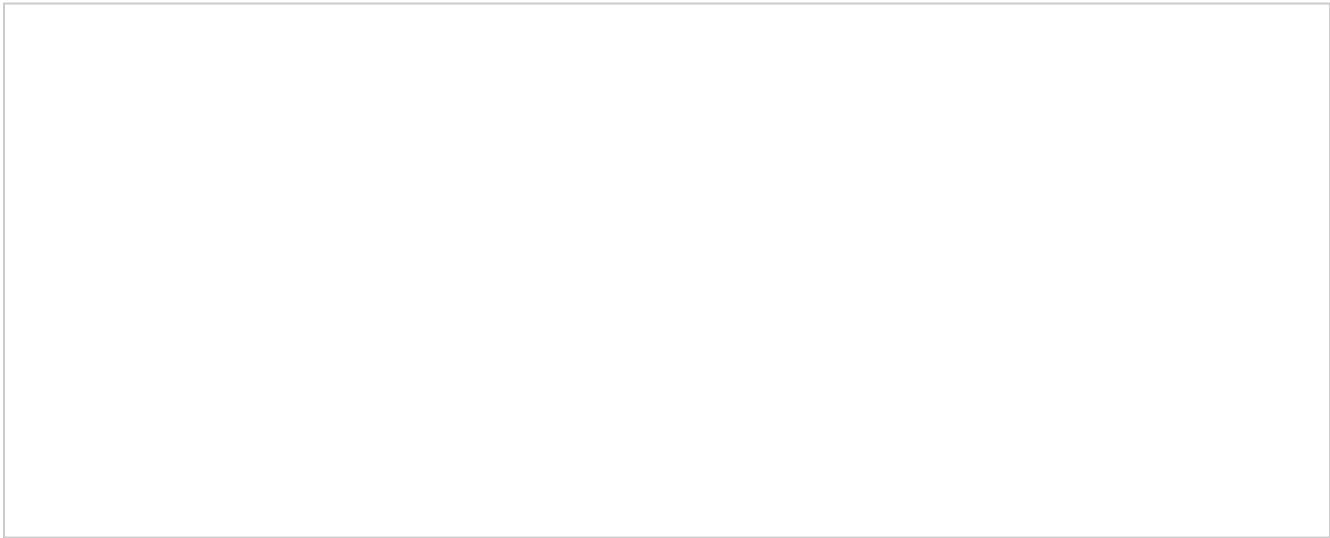
Hand scraping of jeans



Resin treatment process on jeans



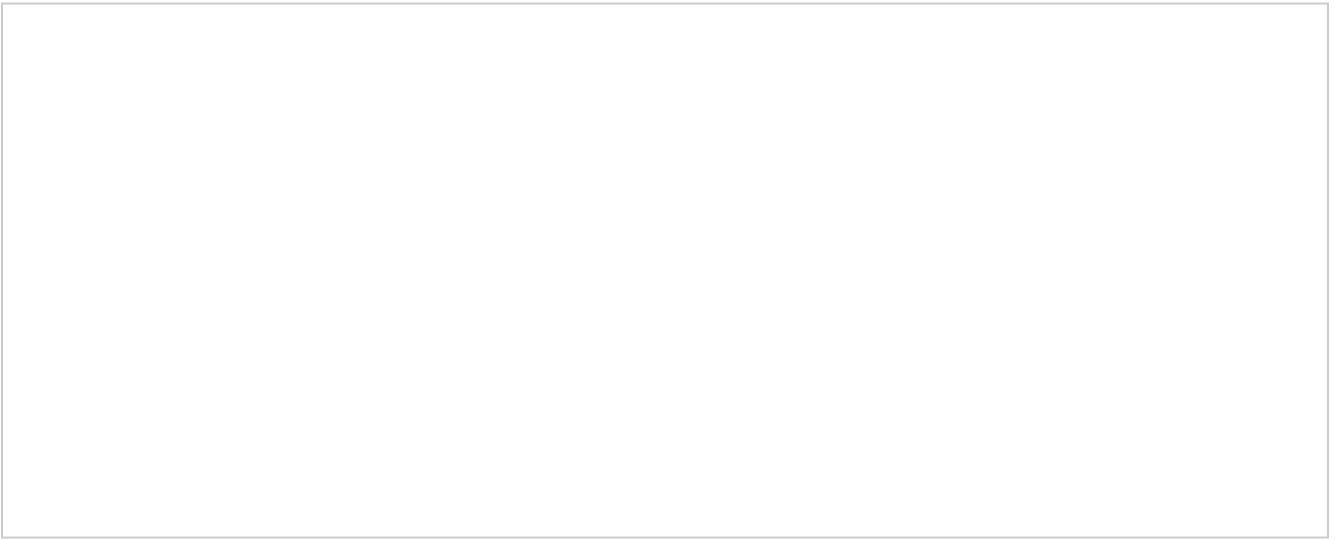
Tacking on jeans (adds strength to high-stress areas).



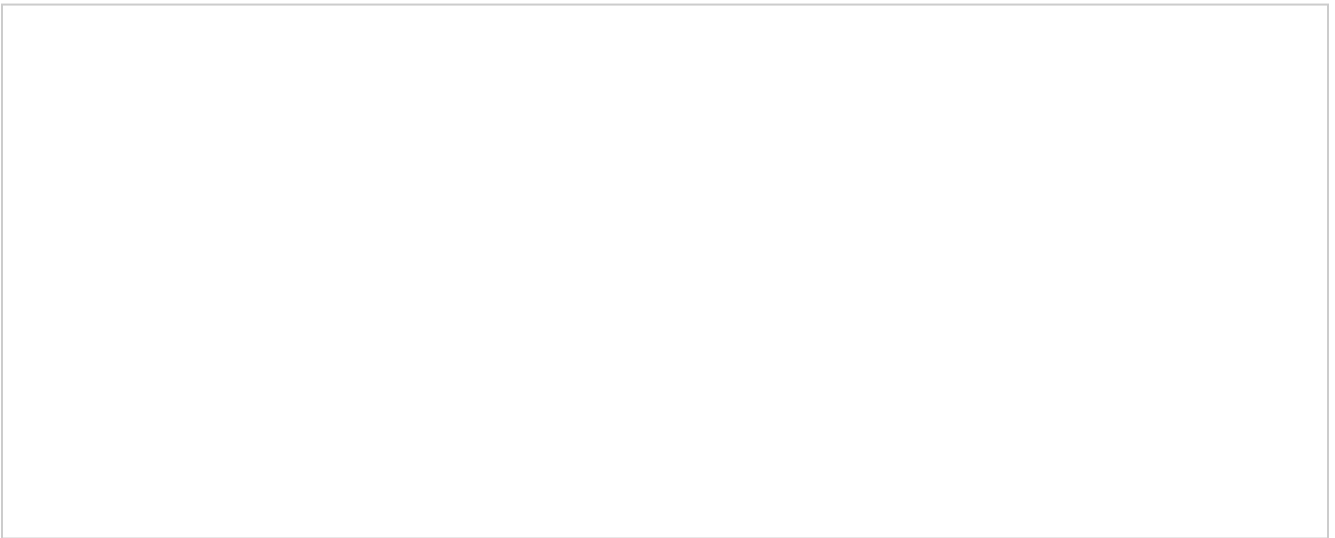
Socks dyeing machine in a washing plant for washing jeans



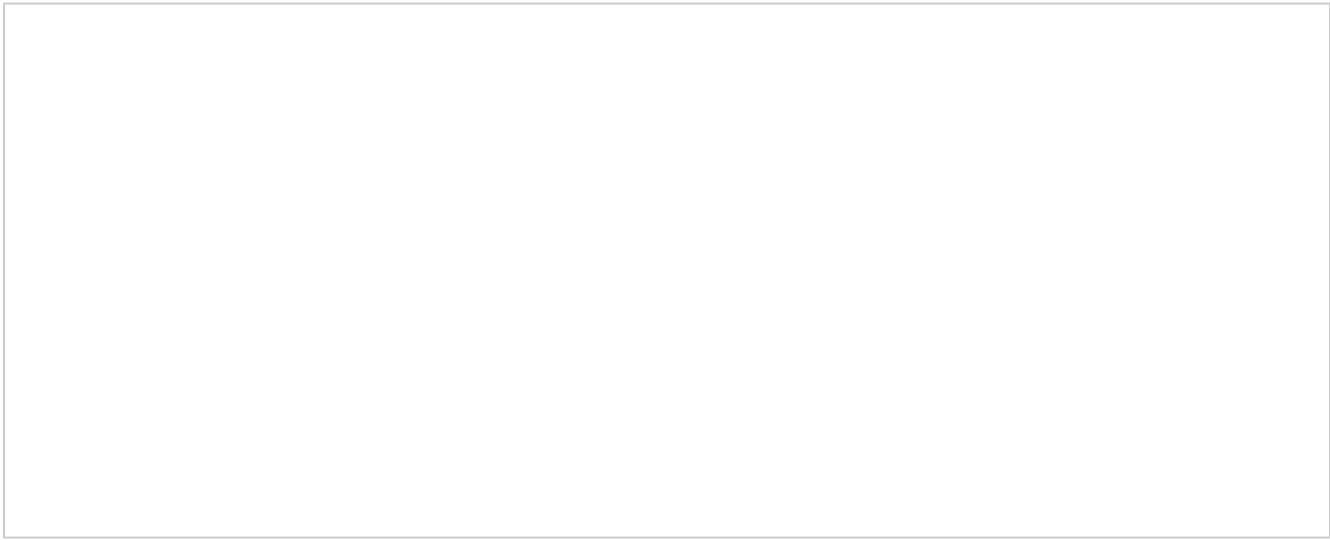
The process of washing and drying jeans



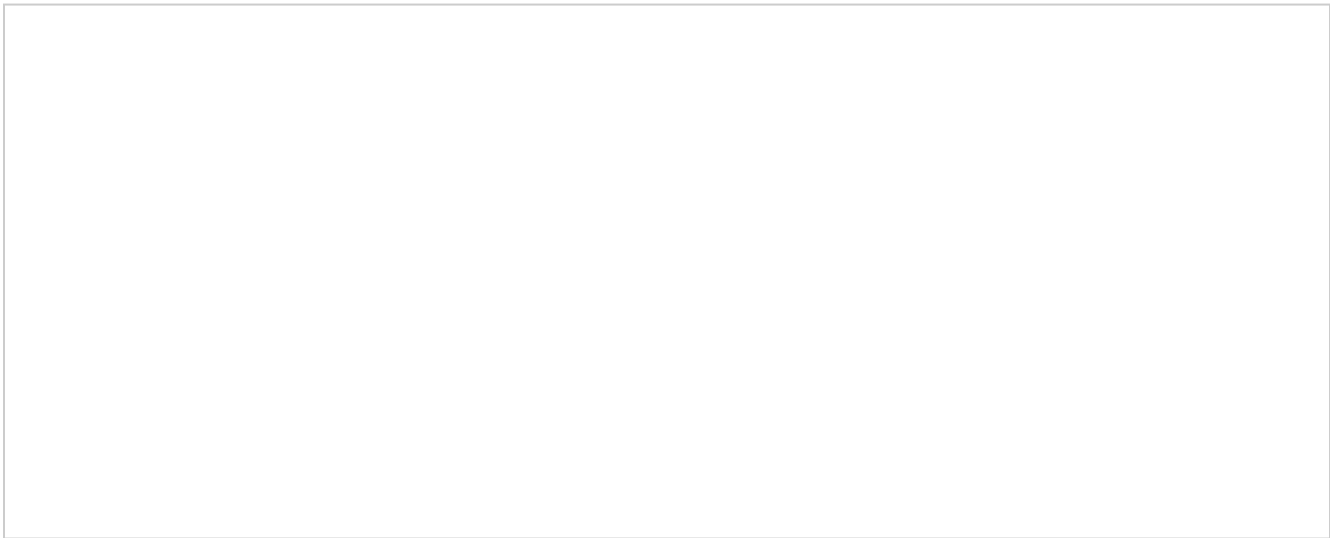
The final steps of preparing jeans for market



Checking the fit on a live model



Quality checking and quality assurance



Jeans are displayed for the buyer in the RMG factory showroom.

See also



- [Athleisure](#)
- [Baggy jeans](#)
- [Daisy Dukes](#)
- [Denim skirt](#) ("jean" skirt)
- [Designer jeans](#)

- Drainpipe jeans
- Jean jacket
- Jeggings
- Jorts
- Mom jeans
- Trousers as women's clothing
- Western fashion

Notes

- a. *Bottom weight fabric is a heavier fabric suitable for pants or skirts (a.k.a. bottoms). Not necessarily a thick or heavy fabric but heavier than something that would be used to make a blouse or shirt.*

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2. See, e.g., *The Richmond Enquirer* (Richmond, VA) March 25, 1823, wherein a paid notice described the ready-made apparel stolen by a thief : FIFTY DOLLARS REWARD, FOR JEREMIAH, or as he is commonly called Jerry Hatcher, lately a convict of the Penitentiary, who on the night of February 17 last did break through my store and carry off a variety of goods, together with about \$20 in change and some ready made clothing, and has made his escape. He is about 4 1/2 or 5 feet high, stout and very well made, with light hair, and I expect has on blue Jeans coatee and brown pantaloons, as he took such from me and has been seen with them on. I expect he is either in Richmond, Petersburg or Lynchburg. Any person who will apprehend said Hatcher and deliver him to me, will meet with my thanks, and the above reward. BRIGHTBERRY BROWN [,] Red Mills, Buckingham [County, Virginia], March 14.
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