



Thread  
Count  
Explained.  
It's not as  
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# Thread Count Explained. It's not as important as you thought.



OK, so, if 280 thread count sheets are good, 600 or even 1000 thread count sheets must be a LOT better. They cost a lot more and are usually sold only in boutique bedroom stores. So they MUST be better, right? Sorry. No.

Here is how to be a savvy consumer and get the best sheets for your money without sacrificing that luxurious look and feel of silky smooth cotton.

First the basics. Bear with me here; don't glaze over. This is the important part.

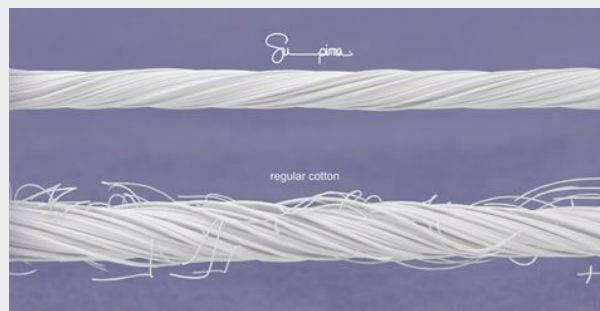
Cotton fibers are twisted together to make a strand. Several of these strands are twisted together to make a thread. A lot of these threads are woven together, and the total number of the threads in a square inch, ( going in either direction ), is listed as the thread count.

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OK so far? Good.

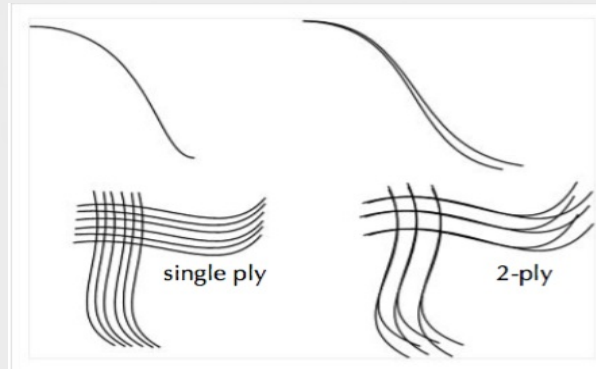
Now, let's step back a bit.

When the fibers are twisted together, the tiny little ends of the fibers will stick out of the strand; this is the scratchy part of the fabric. (This is also where pills happen.) So, the longer the fibers, the fewer ends there are sticking out, and the softer the fabric will feel. Makes sense. Right? So, it follows that the longer fibers are the more desirable fibers. And that means they are the most expensive. Now, put that aside for a minute.



Now let's weave that 2-ply 'yarn' into cloth. If we use 200 pieces of yarn per inch we have used 200 threads. This is actually 200 thread count, 2-ply. However, in order to inflate the actual thread count, we often see this listed as 400 thread count. (They treat one strand as one thread). If we used 100 pieces of 4-ply yarn, we would still have a real thread count of 100, 4-ply but it is probably listed as 400 thread count. There would be fewer pieces of 'yarn' per inch in the 4-ply, and it would be rougher than the 2-ply.

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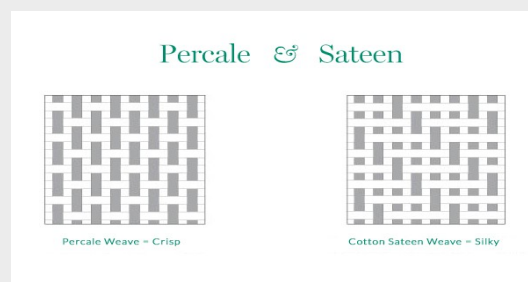
Considering the thickness of good quality cotton fibers, a thread count of about 400 is the best it can be woven into. There just isn't room in one square inch for more filaments.

So how do we get 1000 thread count sheets? By using the inflated method of counting threads, and by adding 'pick' threads which are extra strands of inferior cotton added to the threads to up the count. A 4-ply yarn with four pick threads effectively doubles the thread count.

So, now that you are aware of thread count, how do you buy?

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1. Buy from a retailer who can tell you how the sheets wash and wear. Remember -- they want you to be successful; if they sell you good sheets they know you will be back.
2. Look for the fiber, first. The best sheets are made from 100% Pima or Egyptian cotton. Pima is Egyptian cotton grown in the U.S.A. The longer the staple (the fiber) the softer and finer the threads.
3. Then look for the weave. The weave of the fabric also contributes to the smoothness; a satin weave is smoother than a percale weave.



4. Wet your thumb and forefinger and hold one layer of the sheet between for five seconds or so. Then see how much 'stick' has transferred to your fingers. That's the sizing that will wash out of the sheets when you get home. If it's a lot, beware.

And don't wash your fine sheets with towels, the little fibers from the towels will glom on to the ends of the fibers in the cotton strands and make a nice little pill.

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## Sources

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