

# Stain Removal Guide



## General Rules

- Treat stains promptly. Fresh stains are easier to remove than old ones. If the stain is on a nonwashable fabric, take it to the dry cleaner as soon as possible. Tell the stain and the fiber content of the garment.
- Read and follow package directions when using any stain removal product.
- Always test stain removers on an inside seam or other hidden part of garment for color fastness. To test, apply product and let stand 2-5 minutes, then rinse. If color changes, do not use product on garment.
- When using a bleach, do not try to bleach just one area of garment; bleach the entire garment to prevent uneven color removal.
- When treating, place stained area face down on a clean paper towel or white cloth. Apply stain remover to the underside of the stain, forcing stain off the fabric surface instead of through it.
- Never put chemical dry-cleaning solvents directly into washer.
- Thoroughly rinse and air dry areas treated with dry-cleaning solvents before placing in washer, to avoid a fire.
- Do not mix stain removal products together. Some mixtures, such as ammonia and chlorine bleach, can produce noxious fumes.
- Always launder washable items after treating to remove residues of the stain and the stain remover.
- Have patience; it takes a little extra time and effort to remove some stains.
- Remember, some stains cannot be removed.
- Take nonwashable items to dry cleaner as soon as possible; identify stain and fiber content of garment.

## Definitions

**Detergent**—all-purpose synthetic detergent (liquid or powder). Use liquid detergent full strength; mix powder with water to form a paste when working into stain.

**Dry-Cleaning Solvent**—stain and spot removers available at grocery and hardware stores. A nonflammable type is safest to use.

**Stain Stick**—an enzyme-based cleaner available at grocery and discount stores. Most effective on food, grease, oil, protein, and dirt-based stains and can be used on any fabric and color. It can remain on fabric for up to one week.

## Classification of Stains

- Wet—has a water base, such as fruit juice or sodas
- Dry—has an oil base, such as car grease or suntan lotion
- Combination—contains water and grease, such as meat gravy or ice cream
- Special—an unusual substance, such as tar or ink
- Unknown—one you cannot identify

## Basic Supplies

Acetone  
Ammonia  
Alcohol (denatured or rubbing)  
Amyl Acetate (banana oil)  
Baking soda  
Bar of soap (without deodorant)  
Bleach  
    Chlorine (sodium hypochlorite)  
    Oxygen or perborate (nonchlorine, all-fabric)  
    Hydrogen peroxide  
    Commercial color remover  
Brush (toothbrush)  
Cloth (clean)  
Club soda  
Commercial color remover  
Crystal Salts, such as Epsom salt  
Detergent  
    All purpose  
    Light duty  
Dry-Cleaning Solvent or Spot Remover (contains trichloroethane or perchlorethylene - nonflammable)  
Prewash Products  
    Enzymes presoaks or prewash  
    Enzyme-based stain sticks  
    Spray-type prewash soil and stain removers  
Rust Remover  
Soap (bar or flakes)  
Sponge  
Talcum powder  
Turpentine  
White vinegar

## References

Stain Removal Chart, Soap and Detergent Association, 1991  
Spot and Stain Removal, Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service, 1988  
Stain Removal, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, 1990

[msu.cares.com](http://msu.cares.com)

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**Warning: Always read garment's label for fabric content and to determine if the garment is dry-clean only or wash only.**

**Adhesive Tape, Chewing Gum, Rubber Cement** - Harden surface with ice; scrape with a dull knife. Saturate with a prewash stain remover or cleaning fluid. Rinse, then launder.

**Baby Formula** - Pretreat or soak stain using a product containing enzymes; soak for at least 30 minutes or several hours for aged stains. Launder.

**Beverages (coffee, tea, soft drinks, wine, alcoholic drinks)** - Soak stain in cool water. Pretreat with prewash stain remover, liquid laundry detergent, or a paste of powder detergent and water. Launder with the bleach safe for that fabric. Note: Older stains might respond to treatment with an enzyme product, then laundering.

**Blood** - Soak freshly stained garment in cold water for 30 minutes. Rub detergent into any remaining stain. Rinse, then launder. Dried stains should be pretreated or soaked in tepid water with a product containing enzymes, then laundered. Note: If stain remains, rewash, using a bleach that is safe for that fabric.

**Candle Wax** - Harden with ice, then remove surface wax with a dull knife. Place wax stain between clean paper towels and press with a warm iron. Replace paper towels regularly to absorb more wax and to prevent transferring the stain. Place stain face down on clean paper towels. Sponge remaining stain with a prewash stain remover or dry-cleaning fluid; blot with paper towels. Let dry, then launder. Note: If any color remains, relaunder with a bleach that is safe for that fabric.

**Catsup/Tomato Sauce** - Rinse in cold water, then soak in cool water with 1/4 cup detergent per gallon of water. Spray with a prewash product; launder with a bleach that is safe for that fabric.

**Chocolate** - Treat the stain with a prewash spray or pretreat with a product containing enzymes. If stain remains, relaunder with bleach that is safe for that fabric.

**Collar/Cuff Soils** - Rub area with a stain stick product and let remain for 30 minutes, or longer for heavy stains; launder.

**Coffee, Tea (plain or with sugar/sweetener)** - Flush stain immediately with cool water if possible; or soak for 30 minutes in cool water. Rub the stain with detergent and launder with bleach that is safe for that fabric.

**Coffee, Tea (with cream only)** - Sponge stain with a dry-cleaning solvent. Air dry. Rub with detergent, then launder in hottest water safe for that fabric (with bleach that is safe for that fabric). Pretreat or soak older stains with an enzyme product, then launder.

**Cosmetics** - Pretreat with stain stick, prewash stain remover, liquid detergent, or a paste of granular detergent or laundry additive and water, or rub with bar soap. Work into dampened stain until outline of stain is gone; rinse. If greasy stain remains, soak in an enzyme product. Rinse and launder.

**Crayon (few spots)** - Treat the same as for candle wax, or rub dampened stain with bar soap. Launder with hottest water safe for that fabric. Washer load of clothes can be washed in hot water, using a laundry soap (not detergent) plus 1 cup baking soda. If colored stain remains, launder again, using chlorine bleach, if safe for the fabrics. Otherwise, pretreat or soak in a product containing enzyme or an oxygen bleach using hottest water safe for fabric, then launder.

**Dairy Products (milk, cream, ice cream, yogurt, sour cream, cheese, cream soup)** - Pretreat with stain stick or soak in an enzyme presoak product for 30 minutes if stain is new, or several hours for aged stains; launder.

**Deodorants, Antiperspirants** - Treat light stains with a liquid detergent and then launder. Pretreat heavy stains with a prewash stain remover. Allow to stand 5 to 10 minutes. Launder, using an all-fabric bleach.

**Dye Transfer (white garment that has picked up bleeding dye from other garment)** - Remove stains with a commercial color remover; launder. If stain remains, launder again with chlorine bleach, if safe for that fabric. For colored fabrics and whites that cannot be chlorine bleached, soak in oxygen bleach or an enzyme presoak product, then launder. Note: Proper sorting before laundering and not allowing wet clothing to stay in washer after cycle is completed helps prevent this type of stain.

**Egg** - Pretreat with an enzyme product for 30 minutes for new stain, or several hours for aged stains; launder.

**Fabric Softener** - Moisten stain and rub with bar soap. Rinse, then launder. If stain remains, sponge area with rubbing alcohol or dry-cleaning solvent. Rinse thoroughly and relaunder.

**Fingernail Polish** - Try nail polish remover, but do not use on acetate or triacetate fabrics. Place stain face down on paper towels and flush with remover. Replace paper towels regularly. Repeat until stain disappears; rinse and launder. Some polishes may be impossible to remove.

**Fruit Juices** - Soak garment in cool water. Wash with bleach that is safe for that fabric.

**Grass Stains** - Pretreat with stain stick or soak with an enzyme product. If stain remains, and if safe for dye, sponge stain with alcohol (dilute alcohol with 2 parts water for use on acetate). If stain still remains, launder in hottest water safe for fabrics, with bleach that is safe for that fabric.

**Grease (motor oil, animal fat, mayonnaise, salad dressing, butter, cooking oil and car grease)** - Light stains can be pretreated with a spray stain remover, liquid laundry detergent, or a detergent booster. Launder in hottest water safe for fabric. Place heavy stains face down on clean paper towels. Apply cleaning fluid to the back of stain. Replace towels frequently. Let air dry; rinse. Launder in hottest water safe for that fabric.

**Ink** - Test stain with water or dry-cleaning solvent by placing a drop of each on stain. Use method that removes more of the ink. Ballpoint ink stains can be placed stain face down on white paper towels. Sponge with rubbing or denatured alcohol or dry-cleaning solvent, or rub detergent into stained area. Repeat if some stain remains. Rinse; launder. Drawing ink usually cannot be removed. Try

flushing with cold water until pigments are removed; rub liquid detergent into stain; rinse. Repeat process. Soak in warm sudsy water to which 1 to 4 tablespoons of household ammonia per quart of water have been added. Rinse thoroughly. Launder in hottest water safe for that fabric, with bleach safe for the fabric. Felt Tip or India Ink - Usually cannot be removed. Try pouring water through the stain before it dries, until pigments are removed. Allow to dry. If you notice some reduction in stain, sponge with dry-cleaning solvent. Allow to dry. Rub liquid household cleaner into stain. Rinse. Soak stain (possibly overnight) in warm water to which 1 to 4 tablespoons of household ammonia have been added. Rinse and repeat treatment if necessary; launder.

**Iodine** - Rinse from back side of stain under cool, running water. Soak in solution of color remover, or sponge with a solution of sodium thiosulfate crystals (available at drug store). Rinse and launder.

**Lipstick** - Place face down on paper towels. Sponge area with dry-cleaning solvent, or use a prewash soil and stain remover. Replace towels frequently; rinse. Rub light-duty liquid detergent into stain until outline is removed; launder. Repeat treatment if needed.

**Liquid paper** - Sponge the stain with amyl acetate (banana oil). Air dry. Repeat treatment if necessary. Rub gently with detergent, then launder.

**Mercurochrome or Methyolate** - Rinse out as much of the stain as possible under cool, running water. Soak for 30 minutes in a solution of 1/2 teaspoon ammonia per quart of water. Rinse; if stain remains, soak in a solution of 1 quart warm water and 1 tablespoon vinegar for one hour. Rinse thoroughly and allow to dry. Launder with detergent and bleach. For delicate fabrics, apply alcohol and cover with pad moistened with alcohol. Change pads frequently until stain is removed. Rinse; launder.

**Mildew** - Launder stained items using chlorine bleach, if safe for that fabric. Otherwise, soak in an all-fabric bleach and hot water, then launder. If some stain remains, sponge with hydrogen peroxide. Rinse and relaunder. Dry in sunlight. Badly mildewed fabrics may be damaged beyond repair.

**Mud** - Let dry, then brush off as much mud as possible; or rinse under running water and let soak overnight. For light stains, pretreat with a paste of dry detergent and water, liquid detergent, or a liquid detergent booster; launder. Pretreat heavy stains by presoaking with a laundry detergent, a product containing enzymes, or a container of water with 1/4 cup each of ammonia and liquid detergent; launder. Red clay can be rubbed with a paste of vinegar and table salt. Leave for 30 minutes. Launder with hottest water safe for that fabric and bleach. Repeat if needed.

**Mustard** - Treat with a prewash stain remover, or dampen with water and rub with bar soap. Launder with chlorine bleach, if safe for that fabric, or use an all-fabric bleach.

**Paint** - Water-based paint, such as latex acrylic stains, should be rinsed in warm water while stain is still wet; launder. This stain usually cannot be removed after it dries. For oil-based paints, including varnish, use the solvent listed on the label as a thinner. If label information is unavailable, use turpentine. Rinse. Pretreat with prewash stain remover, bar soap, or detergent. Rinse and launder.

**Perfume** - Treat with prewash stain remover or liquid laundry detergent; rinse and launder.

**Perspiration** - Treat with prewash stain remover, or dampen stain and rub with bar soap. If the color of the fabric has changed slightly, apply ammonia to fresh stain or white vinegar to old stain; rinse. Launder in hottest water safe for that fabric. Stubborn stains may respond to pretreating with a product containing enzymes, then launder using an all-fabric bleach.

**Pine Resin** - Sponge the stain with cleaning fluid; let air dry. Rub with detergent and launder as usual. If stains persist, apply a few drops of household ammonia. Air dry. Launder, using liquid laundry detergent.

**Pollen (tree or flower)** - Sponge, then flush with dry-cleaning solvent. Let air dry. Rub gently with detergent. Launder as usual, using bleach that is safe for that fabric.

**Rust** - Apply a commercial rust remover. Follow manufacturer's instructions. Do not use chlorine bleach on rust.

**Scorch** - Launder with chlorine bleach, if safe for that fabric. Otherwise, soak in an all-fabric bleach and hot water, then launder. Note: Badly scorched stains cannot be removed.

**Shoe Polish** - Pretreat liquid shoe polish with a paste of dry detergent and water; launder. Use a dull knife to scrape residue of paste shoe polish from the fabric. Pretreat with a prewash stain remover or cleaning fluid; rinse. Rub detergent into dampened area. Launder with chlorine bleach, if safe for fabric, or an all-fabric bleach.

**Tar** - Act quickly before stain dries. Use a dull knife to scrape excess tar from the fabric. Place stain face down on paper towels. Sponge with cleaning fluid. Replace towels frequently for better absorption. Launder, using hottest water safe for that fabric.

**Tobacco** - Moisten stain and rub with bar soap; rinse. Pretreat with stain stick or soak in an enzyme solution; launder. Note: If stain remains, launder again using chlorine bleach, if safe for fabric, or use oxygen bleach.

**Urine, Vomit, Mucous, or Feces** - Treat with prewash spray or pretreat with a product containing enzymes. Launder with chlorine bleach that is safe for fabric, or use an all-fabric bleach.

**Yellowing of White Cottons or Linens** - Fill washer with hot water. Add twice the detergent as normal. Place items in washer and agitate four minutes on regular cycle. Stop washer and soak clothes for 15 minutes. Restart washer and agitate 15 minutes. Complete the wash cycle. Repeat process if needed.

**Yellowing of White Nylon** - Soak garment overnight in an enzyme presoak or oxygen bleach. Launder, using hot water and twice as much detergent as usual with an oxygen bleach.