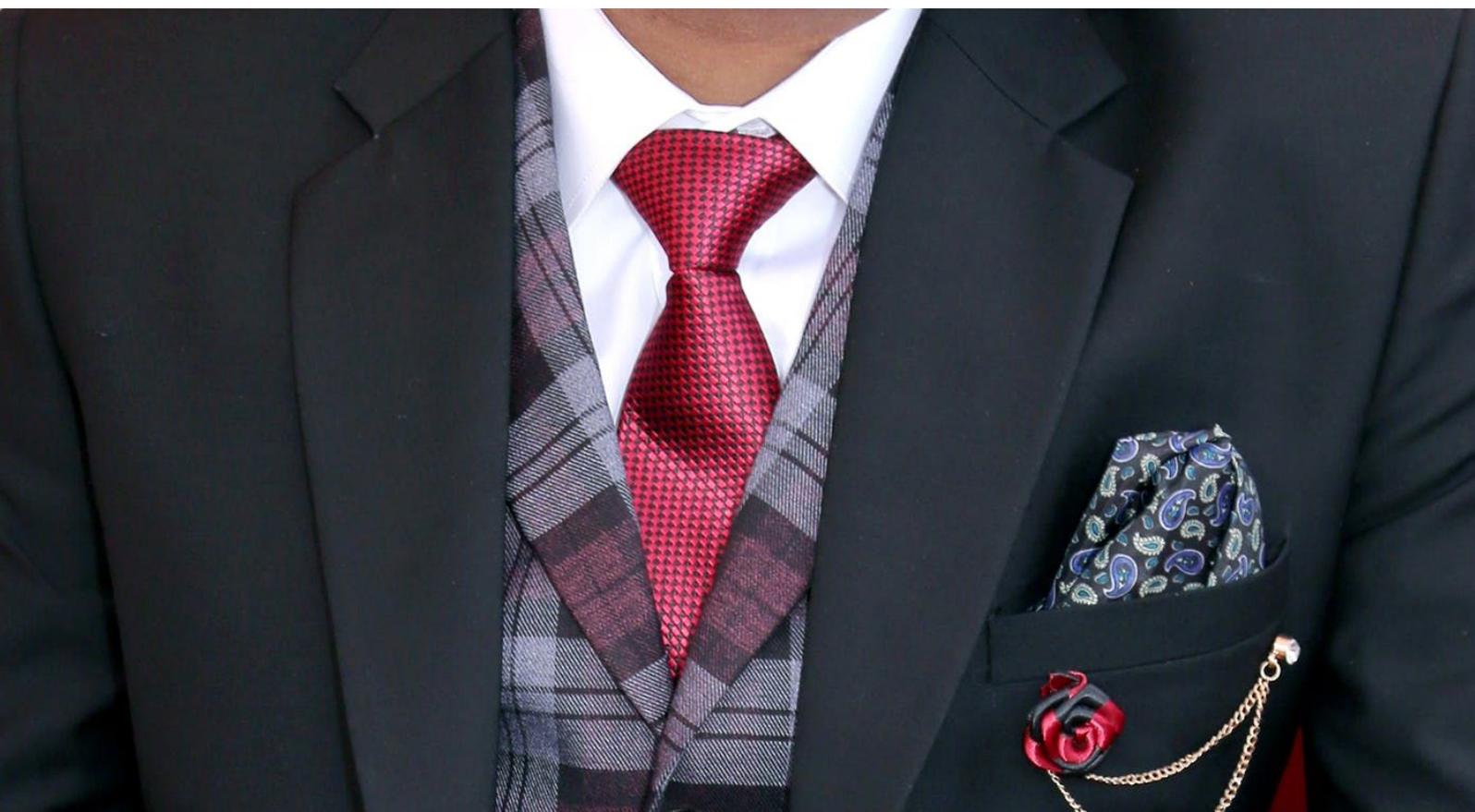


The Ultimate Guide To

WARDROBE MAINTENANCE

Presented by **Real Men Real Style**



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Finally, use your head. Nothing in this Guide is intended to replace common sense, legal, medical or other professional advice, and is meant to inform and entertain the reader.

So have fun and learn to dress sharp!

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Chapter 1: Seven Tips For Washing Menswear

You know you've done it – you've brought something that could have been washed at home to the dry cleaner's, just because you weren't quite sure you'd get it right.

There's no shame in turning to the dry cleaners when you need them.

And for a number of garments it's simply the most convenient option – washing and drying a wool suit at home without damaging it is a time-consuming process.

But in many cases, lighter "delicates" can be washed at home safely. It's just a matter of knowing how to treat the most fragile items in the laundry basket.

These tips work for women's clothes as well as men's, so don't be afraid to impress your spouse or girlfriend with some at-home laundry.

Their clothes often make up the more delicate half of the laundry basket, and they'll appreciate the help.



Tip #1: Read the Labels

As the internet sidebar ads say, here's ONE CRAZY TRICK MOST MEN DON'T KNOW – your clothing generally tells you exactly how to take care of it.

It's always amazing to talk about laundry with guys (well, all right, getting guys to talk about laundry in the first place is amazing in its own right) and see how many are surprised by the idea of checking the garment tags.

The little mess of words and symbols tells you pretty much what you can and can't do.

There are some subtleties worth unpacking – “Dry Clean Only” means just that, for example, while clothes that are simply tagged “Dry Clean” can generally be hand-washed as well.

But in general, if the tag expressly forbids something, don’t do it – a big “X” through the little laundry machine graphic means keep it out of anything with a spin cycle, regardless of temperature.

“Air dry only” means letting the garment sit in the air, not tumbling it on the “cool” setting, and so forth.

Follow the directions – especially the ones that tell you what not to do – and you’ll already have made delicate garment care a dozen times easier.

Tip #2: Learn to Hand Wash

Some delicate fabrics do just fine on the “delicate” cycle in the washer. Most, however, do best when they’re hand-washed.

Good hand washing is a simple but important skill. The basic principle goes like this:

- You fill a large basin, tub, or sink with lukewarm water.
- You stir in a mild detergent (not a “detergent soap” – use plain detergent, otherwise some garments will get soap stains).
- You gently submerge your garments and then swish them slowly from side to side for about five minutes.
- Don’t scrub while you’re doing this, even at stains, and don’t cram too much in at once.
- There should be plenty of water sluicing around and through the fabric.
- Change the water every few loads, especially if you’re treating badly soiled clothes.
- You don’t want to be washing your last couple loads in dirty water.
- Even a full laundry hamper can be done in about half an hour this way.



It's not the most exciting task in the world (though it is soothing, in a way), so put on some music or an audiobook or the TV before you get started.

Tip #3: Treat Stains Immediately

Never let a stain sit. Quick pre-treatment can make the difference between a short, effective hand-wash later and a permanent stain.

As soon as possible, wet stains with plain water. Organic stains made from animal proteins (blood, fat, etc.) can "cook" to permanence if you use hot water, so keep it lukewarm or cold for those. Inorganic stains like dirt and synthetic oils can be treated with warm or hot water.

Dab the water onto the stained cloth from behind the stain, and set it face down on a paper towel or other neutral, absorbent cloth – that way the staining substance is leeching naturally off the surface of your garment, rather than soaking deeper into it.

Tip #4: Soaking Never Hurts

If you've got something that's stained, rather than just dirty, soaking it never hurts.

By "soaking" we mean immersing the whole item in water and letting it sit for a while. A couple of hours to a whole day in room-temperature water will give whatever is staining the cloth plenty of time to weaken and break apart, making later treatments quicker and easier.

Be sure the whole garment is submerged. Some delicate fabrics will swell when wet and you want the fibers to change size evenly, so that they don't warp out of place.

As long as the whole garment is wet and then dried at the same rate, you should be fine.

Tip #5: Hand Wash in a CLEAN Basin

The easiest way to clean most delicate fabrics is by hand (we'll go into more detail on how in just a moment). But before you start, make sure the vessel you're using (usually a sink or bathtub) is scrubbed clean with water and a fresh brush.

You want to get rid of stains and mildew, but you also want to get rid of any harsh chemicals you have used in the past. If there's Clorox clinging to the tub when you fill it, your wash water now contains bleach.

That's going to have an unexpected – and unwelcome – effect on your clothing.



Tip #6: Dry Clothing Flat

Delicate clothing, whether it's been hand-washed or washed on a delicate cycle, generally needs to be air-dried. That means "dried by sitting out in the air," not tumbled in a hot-air drier, and the best way to do that is lying flat.

Some delicate fabrics can be hung on a clothesline just fine, but others will crease where they're folded over the rope.

Clothespins can be even harder on fragile weaves, and can leave permanent dimples in the garment.

It can be tough to find enough flat space in a home to lay all your wet clothes out, so hang what you can (sturdy cottons, etc.) and only lay the delicates out.

A clean grate or rack with slots in it that allows airflow underneath the garments works best – dish racks, baking racks, and futon frames are all good low-budget options that you may already have around the home. Just make sure they're clean.

Turn the garments over every half-hour or so to make sure everything dries evenly and doesn't gather mildew.

Drying time can range from under an hour to over a day, depending on your climate and space.

Tip #7: Machine Wash Wisely

Not all your delicates need to be hand washed.

Most things labeled as "delicate," "dry clean," or "hand wash" (as opposed to "dry clean ONLY" or "hand wash ONLY") can be safely put in a washing machine – as long as you're careful.

The best washing machines to use are ones that do not have a central agitator.

That's the big "stalk" rising up from the middle of most conventional in-home washing machines.

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You can buy ones without the agitator, and many laundromats use larger spinning drums that don't have agitators as well (these tend to be front-loading rather than top-loading – always a good clue).

Using the “delicate” setting on the machine is another obvious aid to gentle washing.

If cycles are listed in terms of heat and length instead, go for a “cool” or “warm/cold” or similar setting (not cold, and definitely never hot) and a short wash cycle.

Your goal is to come as close as you can to the experience of swishing the garments around in a big basin, only without having to be there doing the swishing yourself.

The further you get from that, the harder it'll be on your clothing.

Delicate items can also be stored in thin, water-permeable washing bags to keep them from snagging on other clothing or internal machinery.

It won't prevent staining if you've got dye problems, but it does reduce the likelihood of stretching and tearing.

Finally – because of those aforementioned dye problems – always wash colored items with similar colors.

If it's an item's first time through the wash, throw it in on its own, or with something you don't mind staining, just so you can see how badly it “bleeds.”

Washing a new item with an old rag is a good test of a garment's dye. If the rag comes out with new colors on it, keep washing that item alone for a while.

Here's a video to summarize this chapter. [Click here](#) to watch.



Chapter 2: When to Dry Clean Your Shirt

A guide to caring for a men's suit.

Dry cleaning is the best method for getting stains out of a men's dress suit.

Often we take our suits to the dry cleaners too often. This menswear guide explains how to tell when it's time to take a suit in for dry-cleaning.

A man's dress suit is one of the most expensive additions to most men's wardrobes.

So knowing how to care for and clean a dress suit is something that all men should be knowledgeable about.

Whether you wear an off the rack suit, or a are looking into a bespoke - custom tailored - suit, sooner or later it will need dry cleaning.



How does dry cleaning work?

Despite what the name suggests, dry cleaning uses a liquid solvent by the name of perchloroethylene (or perc) to remove dirt and oils from fabrics.

The dry cleaning process was discovered by accident in 1825 by Jean-Baptiste Jolly. One evening, Jolly accidentally spilled a lamp of turpentine onto a tablecloth. Once the turpentine dried, the cloth in that spot was cleaner. Thus the birth of dry cleaning.

How to tell if your dress suit needs dry cleaning

There is not an exact science that tells you when it's time to take your suit coat and trousers to the dry cleaner. However, most of us visit the dry cleaners too often.

A good rule of thumb is to dry clean your menswear when brushing, airing out and spot cleaning aren't removing the odors, dirt or stains any more. If you rarely wear a suit, this may be as little as once a year. Of course if you live in your dress suit, you may dry clean more frequently.

Dry clean your dress suit as little as possible. Perc strips the wool fibers of their natural oils. This causes the fibers to become brittle and your dress suit to become worn-though well before its time.

How to choose a dry cleaner for your dress suit

When it comes time to clean your suit, do a bit of homework. Check America's Best Cleaners, or search Google for any reviews of dry cleaners near you.

There is no shortage of dry cleaners, but the ones who have been in business for a while will have both a good following and a good reputation.

Take the time to call a few local dry cleaners. If they're willing to take the time to answer your questions, that may be a sign that you can trust them with your custom suit.

Don't forget to find out if they do their dry cleaning in-house, or send it out to a larger facility. This may not seem like a big deal but it will make a world of difference the first time an item gets misplaced.

Pay attention to how your clothes are handled at intake. A good clerk will mark any spots or problem areas which may need pretreating. Also, be sure to point out any loose buttons.

Get a detailed receipt of what you're dropping off for your records as well. This is a great guide to dry cleaning.

How to care for your suit between dry cleaning visits

To keep a suit looking its best between trips to the dry cleaners, here's a few tips that can help.



Rotate your suits. Wearing the same suit over and over will cause it to show wear after a while.

Use a steam cleaner to remove wrinkles before wearing. Set the steam to the lowest heat setting. This way you always appear freshly pressed without the added costs.

Brush off any dirt or food particles that may be clinging to the suit after you wear it. Start by going against the grain of the cloth and use short, quick strokes. Finish with a second pass that goes with the nap.

Allow your suit to hang for a day or two on a good wood hanger after wearing it. This allows the material to recover and drape out most wrinkles between uses. Make sure all of the pockets are empty to avoid creating creases, or odd shapes in your suit.

Cover it up. Use a cloth cover which allows air to still circulate through the suit even when it's being stored.



When and how often should you dry clean your suit? [Click here](#) to watch.

Chapter 3: Washing & Cleaning Clothing

There's no shame in finding laundry a little confusing -- these days, there are so many different settings and symbols on an average washing machine that it's like reading a foreign language.

Unfortunately, improper washing is a great way to destroy your clothing.

Dyes can bleed, sizes can shrink, and in worst-case scenarios delicate fabrics can actually be torn by too much agitation.

It's also worth knowing which clothes need which care: some can be laundered at home, while others should be dry cleaned, and some pieces benefit from ironing while others will be destroyed by it.

It's important to understand all the options!

Washers and Dryers

Most clothes can be laundered at home in a typical washer and dryer. Whether clothes can be or not is easy to tell: check the tag.

If it has symbols or written instructions for machine wash, it can go in. If it says "dry clean only" or "hand wash only," it can't.

Setters on dryers and washers will vary, but the two key factors are the temperature and the wash cycle. The first determines how hot the water or air is; the second determines how violently the machine "agitates," or spins, the clothing.

HOT cycles are the most effective cleaners, but also the hardest on clothing.

Knit cotton (T-shirts, underwear, etc.) can be dried on high heat; most other things need a cooler setting.



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Hot water is fine for light colors, but bright colors will last longer if you wash them cold.

WARM settings are fine for most "permanent press" articles (and are usually the same thing as a "PERM PRESS" setting, if the washer/dryer has one).

It's a good setting for your dress shirts and slacks.

COLD settings help set dyes, making them ideal for bright colors, and they're easier on delicate fabrics.

Anything stretchy or non-cotton should go in on the DELICATE or COLD setting for both wash and dry.

CYCLE may or may not be variable, depending on your machine. A higher agitation washes the clothes more thoroughly, but also subjects the clothing to more twisting and stretching.

Save long, powerful wash cycles for your sturdy cottons, and wash everything else on a shorter, less agitated cycle.

The other big aid to proper washing is keeping your colors sorted.

Whites can be washed with light colors and lightly-patterned whites if you're not bleaching (only pure white can be washed with chlorine bleach), while bright colors should be kept separate and can be washed with non-chlorine bleach to set the colors if desired.

Mixing bright colors and light garments is a good way to permanently discolor the light ones, and the bright colors will fade over time if you're washing them on warm cycles without any bleach.

Keep them separate to give both a longer life span. A final washer/dryer consideration is time -- always get the clothes transferred as quickly as possible.

Sitting in the washer wet allows clothes to wrinkle and can let mildew start to grow, while leaving dry clothes in a dryer gives creases time to settle in. Hang clothes as soon as possible to prevent wrinkling.

Ironing

Ironing is the art of following directions. Most garments can be pressed, but different fabrics require different amounts of heat and water.

Check both the garment tag and the iron settings before ironing anything. If you're unsure of the requirements, ask your tailor or cleaner, or just have it professionally cleaned.

Certain fabrics, especially wool, can take on odd textures or burn through entirely if improperly pressed.

Any sort of ironing or pressing needs to follow a few basic guidelines to create a clean crease and preserve the fabric:

Everything involved needs to be clean. Check the garment carefully for stains, and make sure there's no dirt on the ironing board or the iron itself. Any discoloration that you press in is likely to become permanent.

Spread garments completely flat. Any wrinkles that you press will be set until the garment's next washing and pressing, and potentially even through several rounds if you press them deep enough. Work section by section if needed -- the whole garment doesn't need to fit on the ironing board, just the part you're currently working on.

Pockets can be turned inside-out or moved beneath the fabric so that they're never under the iron. Avoid pressing down on both the outer fab



Chapter 4: Wardrobe Organization and Layout

Have you ever noticed that most closets have a "closet smell" to them?

It's a smell we use words like "old" and "musty" to describe. It's not a very good smell, and you don't want your clothes reeking of it.

There are two main causes of that musty smell: dust from insufficient cleaning, and more dust and mildew from clothes that are pressed too tightly together.

Wardrobe organization is all about making sure your clothes have room to breathe in your closet, shelves, and drawers. It's also handy when you're in a rush in the morning -- having a system in place makes throwing together an outfit much easier.

Storage Requirements

Not all closets are created equal. Some of us make do with no closet at all, just a standing bar for hangers. So what's the bare minimum a gentleman's clothes need for good storage?

- At least half an inch between garments, especially wool suits and jackets. This gives room to air, prevents dust-filled pockets from forming, and helps keep wardrobe disasters like a moth infestation or mold colony from spreading from one garment to the next.
- Protection from light -- direct sunlight will fade dyes and turn fabrics brittle over time. Pull shades down or put up blackout paper over closet windows, keep the doors shut when you're not using the closet, and invest in a covering sheet, curtain, or screen if you use a free-standing rack.



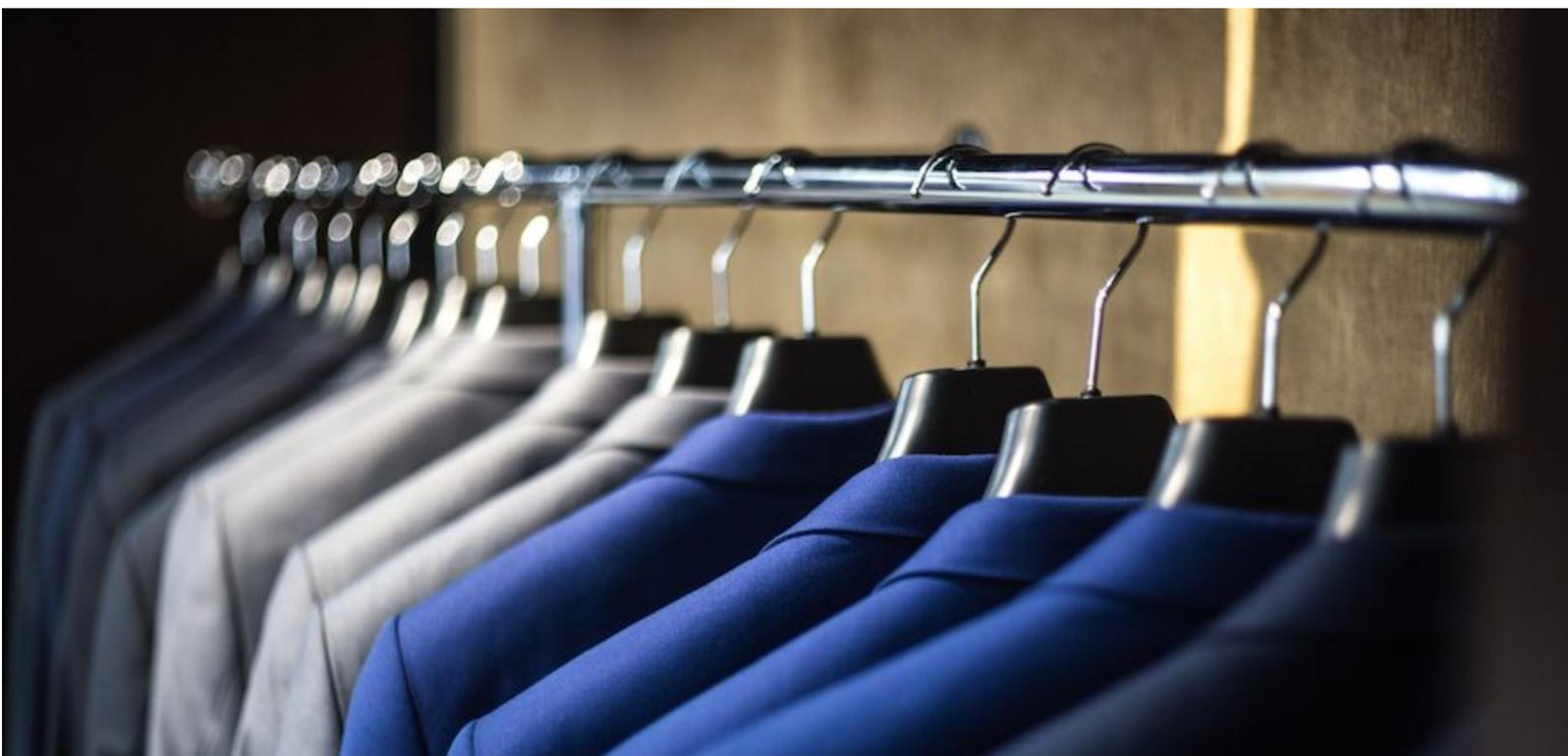
- Drawers need enough room that folded garments can lay flat without bunching up at the edges. They can be stacked, but should be flat for it, and the drawer should be able to slide shut smoothly without catching on or wrinkling the upper layer.

The key word here is room -- room for garments to breathe, room for everything to lie or hang flat; room to keep everything from being jammed together and wrinkling. The larger and more expensive the garment (suits, wool sweaters, etc.), the more space it's going to need for proper airing.

All About Hangers

Clothing that goes on a hanger is eventually going to be affected by the hanger you use. Wool is particularly susceptible to taking on the shape of whatever it lies on -- that's why well broken-in wool suits have an excellent "drape" on the wearer's body, but it's also a hazard when you're storing them unworn for long periods of time.

- A wool jacket should always be stored on a molded hanger with a broad, sloped frame in the shape of a man's shoulders, not on a stiff, triangular wire hanger. Wood hangers are the best (they breathe naturally, and if made from aromatic wood like cedar or sandalwood can help keep insects away as well), but at the very least have a shoulder-shaped plastic hanger.



- Pants will crease into the shape of the hanger's bar over time. Using a rounded wood bar instead of a thin wire reduces the effect, as does wrapping the hanger bar in soft cloth. High-quality pants hangers usually have either a felt-covered bar for the trousers to drape over or a pair of felt-padded clips to hold them hanging in place.
- Shirts, especially 100% cotton ones, are more forgiving of sharp hangers. Wood or thick plastic is still better for them, but they can survive on wire hangers as long as you wear them regularly. Anything being stored for the long term, however, should be either put on a thicker hanger or folded neatly and stored flat.
- Hanger bags (available and often even complimentary at most dry cleaners) are a good option for anything that you don't wear regularly.

Slip a bit of mothball or cedar wood in the bag to keep insects off and seal it up -- just be sure to dry the item entirely first, so that there's no moisture trapped inside.

High-quality hangers can seem like a frivolous investment, but the better your wardrobe is the more sense it makes -- why let a 25-cent piece of metal ruin a \$1000 suit?

It's worth the twenty bucks to keep your jacket looking crisp and healthy in the long run.

Organizing for Your Convenience

Everyone has to work out his own system, but it's helpful to have a system for what goes where in your closet.

There are a couple of ways you can break it down: color grouping is one popular strategy, as is grouping by function and formality.

In the former, you simply group colors with like colors. All the white shirts hang on one end, followed by white-with-pattern shirts, then blue, and so on.

It's a helpful strategy for men who don't like to think too hard about color choice in the morning, and particularly useful for the 8% or so of men that have some form of color-blindness.

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An even more common strategy is to divide garments up by function: business suits in one cluster, business shirts in another, then dress slacks, casual jackets, casual shirts, and finally jeans and other casual pants.



The particular order varies based on preference, but the goal is to limit yourself to one section of the wardrobe no matter what you're dressing for.

As long as it gives everything some breathing room, your system can be whatever it needs to be. The point is to find something that works for you -- and to have a system, not a closet of randomly placed hangers and garments.

Chapter 5: Caring for Your Wardrobe

Buying clothes, of course, is only half the battle. Good clothes need good care, and with it they can last a lifetime. Additions like shoe trees or quality hangers for your suits are not frivolous expense -- they're necessities that can save hundreds or thousands of dollars over the years.

Suits and Jackets

Most suits and sport coats are made primarily out of wool with a liner fabric that is most commonly synthetic acetate. Some will have other synthetic materials added for strength or durability (or as a cost-saving measure in cheaper garments, which are best to avoid). Wool gives the garments warmth, absorbency, and a soft luster and feel, but has specific care requirements.

- Suits are almost always dry-clean only. This should be done often enough to remove any odors or obvious staining, but is not necessary otherwise -- regular dry-cleaning will actually shorten the life of the suit (see our section on dry cleaners for more detail).
- Running a suit brush over your suit after each wear cleans dirt and dust off and saves a lot of trips to the cleaner. A brushing and airing is usually adequate cleaning for a suit, unless it has been heavily worn or soiled.
- Wool holds shapes well, and as such should never be left folded or crumpled for extended periods of time.
- Good hangers have a curved upper part in the shape of a man's shoulders and a clasping lower rod -- rather than folding the pants in half over it, use the rod to grip the cuffs of the trousers, letting them hang straight down.
- Wool absorbs water well but loses its strength when wet, so be particularly cautious about folding or wrinkling damp suits.
- Let them dry on flat surfaces to avoid stretching or deforming.

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- Heat can damage the animal proteins in wool fibers, so suits should be steamed rather than ironed to remove wrinkles.
- Men who wear pieces of their suits separately to create different outfits (which we encourage) should be sure to wear each piece with about equal frequency.

Repeated wear of one piece will lighten the dyes, and a matched suit can become unmatched if one piece stays in the closet too much.

- Wherever you store your suits, be sure to include some form of moth and insect repellent. Moth balls contain toxic ingredients, but there are natural alternatives such as lavender and cedar that work equally well.

If suits are being stored for a long time, have them professionally cleaned for storage to make sure that no insect eggs are sealed up with the garment. An opaque bag or a sealed closet will help protect your suit from light, which will damage the dyes over time.

Shirts

Men's dress shirts are typically cotton, sometimes with synthetic blending or chemical treatments for wrinkle resistance.

We generally recommend a high-quality, 100% untreated cotton shirt over the alternatives -- the slight increase in care needs is well worth the comfort and long life span of cotton garments.

- Cotton shirts are fairly resilient garments. They can be washed in commercial or home machines, though we recommend a "delicate" setting to lengthen their lifespan.



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- Typically speaking, a stain that doesn't come out on the most delicate setting would be better treated by hand anyway -- don't rely on the machine to do the work, and stress the fabric in the process.
- Wrinkles can be steamed out as with suits, but this leaves the shirt rather limp-looking. For a very crisp dress shirt, iron regularly. Unlike wool fibers, cotton is not damaged by the hot iron (unless you turn it up too high or press too long, of course -- a little goes a long way with an iron). Shirts iron best when they've just come out of the dryer and are already a little warm and damp.
- Use bleach very sparingly, and only to treat very stubborn stains. More comes out with soap and water than you'd think, and bleach weakens the fibers of cotton considerably.



- We shouldn't have to say it, but launder your white shirts separately from your colored shirts. Anything that's mostly white can go in the same load; throwing your khakis or a white shirt with colored striping in isn't going to

hurt anything -- but keep the blue jeans and printed T-shirts away from the good white cotton.

Trousers

Wool trousers should be cared for just like suits and jackets -- avoid stretching or folding them, especially when wet, brush them after wear and dry clean when necessary, and hang them so that they fall straight.

Cotton slacks and blue jeans are more resilient, and can be laundered or ironed like shirts.

Shoes

Good leather shoes are their own special project, though not a lengthy one.

The key thing to remember is that leather is an animal product -- it tears and damages just like living skin, but without the ability to heal itself.

Careful maintenance can turn a good pair of shoes from a yearly investment into one that you make every decade or so.

- Every time you take your shoes off, give them a quick brush.
- You can use a shoe brush or a soft rag, or in a pinch just the palm of your hand, but go ahead and knock the dust off. This helps keep anything harmful in the general street detritus (salt is a big offender) from sitting on the leather and causing long-term damage.
- Polish should be about a weekly ritual for any regularly-worn shoe. Shoe polish doesn't just keep shoes looking pretty; it protects and restores the leather's suppleness and keeps the constant flexing from permanently cracking stress points.
- Shining your shoes isn't hard or time-consuming; it takes about fifteen minutes at the outside to apply the polish with a soft brush or cloth, let it dry, and knock the extra off with a stiff-bristled brush.
- A waterproofing compound is basically mandatory anywhere outside of a desert climate. Leather shrinks and cracks when it gets wet and dries. A good, deep-penetrating compound can be used a few times a year, or more regularly in wet months.

- Good shoes should always be stored with a "shoe tree" -- this is a piece or two pieces of wood with a slightly flexible metal joint that allows it to fit the shape of the shoe. Less regularly-worn shoes particularly need shoe trees to help keep them from sagging and wrinkling over time.

Laundry and Ironing

As embarrassing as it can be to admit, many men don't actually know how to use their laundry machine. They tend to throw everything in on either the "COLORS" or "WHITES" setting and hope for the best.

The good news is that there are some things you can do that with -- on most machines, the "WHITES" setting is actually the best option for your white dress shirts, for example. But knowing the basics of laundry and ironing is still pretty vital to good wardrobe care, and easy enough to pick up in just a few trips to the washing machine.

- Settings will be different from machine to machine. Try not to rely on labels like "COLORS" or "DELICATES" -- these may be misleading. Instead, sort your colors from your whites, and your lighter, stretchable clothes from the sturdy cottons. Use the warm water and warm dry settings for the white cottons -- those won't have any trouble holding up to the heat. Cold water and warm dry works best for colored cottons, and anything lighter or permanent-press should take a cool wash and cool dry to keep it in good shape.
- Get clothes out of the washer and into the dryer as soon as possible. Letting dried clothes sit just wrinkles them a bit, but letting them sit wet can press wrinkles into place and allow mildew to grow. Hang dried clothes up as soon as possible to prevent small wrinkles and to allow them to air.
- Ironing is the art of keeping the shirt spread nice and flat as you run the iron over it, and of never staying in the same place. You don't actually need very detailed instructions -- make sure the shirt is slightly damp, the iron has water in its reservoir, and that you're ironing the fabric flat instead of pressing a wrinkle into place. It's not necessary to put your weight into ironing; the weight of the iron is ample.

- Only iron clean clothes, and only on a clean ironing board (washable covers can be a big help here). Stains on the fabric or the board can become permanent if you press them in with heat.



Dry Cleaning

Unless it happens to be his profession, a man is never going to be called upon to dry-clean his own garments, but that doesn't mean that the results are beyond your control.

Just choosing a good cleaner's goes a long way, and knowing what instructions to give is crucial. Here are the basics:

Don't dry clean at all if you don't need to. The solvent (called "perc" in the industry, a shortened form of the chemical name) is hard on fabric, especially with repeated use.

If brushing and airing no longer give you a clean, odor-free garment, it's time to dry clean. Otherwise, leave the clothes at home.

Check out your options before selecting a dry cleaner's.

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It's not actually added expense to drive further or pay a little more if it keeps your suit from getting lost in an enormous system of trucks and centralized plants -- we always recommend cleaners that have machinery "in house" or "on premises" for this reason, in fact.

Read the lost/damaged garment replacement policy. Then ask about it. Then ask about it some more.

There's a sort of "blue book" for clothing called the Fair Claims Guide that bases value on age, allowing a cleaner to pay out a few hundred dollars for a suit more than a year or two old, even if it cost thousands and was still in great shape.

Look for a cleaner that has a personalized, in-house replacement policy that gives you fair compensation.

Ask questions about their treatments for various fabrics. You don't have to be a jerk and "test" the staff by requesting improper treatments to see if they catch it (and you might wind up having your clothes accidentally laundered improperly if you do!), but it's perfectly reasonable and gentlemanly to smile and say "I'm very attached to this garment -- what do you usually do with this sort of fabric?"

Try to find cleaners that have existed in the same place and under the same name for many years. Somewhere that changes its name or purported owner is usually just shifting bank accounts around to pay less taxes or to dodge a compensation claim, and that doesn't say anything good about the cleaner.

When it does come time to go to the cleaners, give them good information. Point out stains and tell them what caused them, be detailed about any special requests, and be sure to let them know if you don't want any services that might be assumed -- most cleaners will press shirts after laundering them, for instance, so if you believe that no one can get your collars just right but you, tell them to skip the step.

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Some dry cleaners now advertise "green" alternatives to the chemical-intensive perc. The cleaning effectiveness of these methods is usually about on a par with traditional dry cleaning, but some of the health impacts of the new treatments have not been fully evaluated, and at least one of the "green" options (volatile methyl siloxane) has been shown to cause cancer in rats in lab tests.

As much as we like to encourage environmentally responsible practices, we're inclined to lean toward traditional dry cleaning as better for your health and your clothing than newer methods right now.



Another alternative to dry cleaning is "wet" cleaning that uses carefully-controlled water treatments to safely clean clothes that would ordinarily require water-free cleaning. This is an expensive and complicated process, so many cleaners don't offer it.

We don't recommend seeking out a cleaner's just because they offer wet cleaning, but if a cleaner you like does have the option, it's a more environmentally-friendly process that's also easier on your clothes. That said, it's easier to damage the clothes through error or inexperience, so be cautious and try a few articles you aren't as attached to first.

As Time Goes On: Keeping up the Wardrobe

Stocking a good wardrobe doesn't happen in a day, and there's always room for improvement. You'll add pieces and remove them as time goes on, updating your look to stay contemporary or just pruning out the well-used articles when they become too worn (although a beloved dress shirt can always become a grungy work shirt for the garage or garden if you can't bear to part with it).

Keeping pieces of the wardrobe repaired and in continuing good shape saves money -- and knowing when to finally let something go saves face.

Adjustments and Repairs

Some adjustments can be made when you purchase clothing; others will happen as either you or the clothing changes shape.

Either way a good tailor can save you buying whole new pieces of clothing and keep old favorites wearable for many years longer than they would have without upkeep.

We recommend shopping for a tailor in the same way you shop for a cleaner -- look for someone with good policies covering lost or damaged clothing, a shop that's been in place a respectable amount of time, and above all someone you can communicate with clearly and who is willing to discuss and understand your needs.

Only a few things are truly irreparable, so it's worth approaching your tailor about any damages or general wear to your clothing; at the very least, look to a tailor (or just a skilled friend or your own two hands) for the basics of upkeep:

Buttons and zippers can be sewn back on or tightened up with almost no skill.

You could probably find a video on Google and walk yourself through it, if you have a needle and thread lying around.

Otherwise just get it done whenever something pops loose.



Most shirts will have spare buttons on the shirrtails, but be advised that the cuff buttons on suit jackets are not meant to be used the same way -- try not to remove those unless you absolutely cannot find a matching replacement at a store, and then be sure to remove the same number of buttons from each cuff.

Trouser legs can be let out or hemmed shorter with relatively little difficulty as well, so long as there is cloth to work with.

A good tailor should be able to give you the width of cuff you desire as well as the right length of leg, and will probably give the trousers a good pressing around the cuff to smooth out any creasing from the old positioning as well.

Jacket sleeves can be let out much like trouser legs, but the operation is complicated by the sleeve lining and the buttons at the wrist.

See a tailor, but you can reasonably expect to add or subtract an inch or so if you need to.

Waist suppression means exactly what it sounds like -- bringing the waist of a jacket in to make a more pronounced "V" shape over your torso.

The reverse can be done if a jacket is starting to be difficult to button. Waistbands on trousers can be let out or brought in in a similar fashion, and for about the same price or a bit less.

Tapering can bring a shirt in closer to the body if it's long enough but too broad for you.

Lining on jackets or trousers can be replaced, and should be if they are starting to look seriously worn or are holding odors.

Holes are reasonably easy fixes along seams, but very challenging anywhere else. A highly skilled tailor can take spare cloth from another part of a garment and weave it in beneath a rip to create a seamless patch, but only with small holes -- bring your clothing in as soon as they start to rip!

The larger the rip, the costlier the fix, and the less likely it is to succeed in any lasting way.

Updating the Wardrobe

Realistically, if you enjoyed building your wardrobe, you're going to keep adding to it (and if you didn't enjoy it, we hope you at least did a good job and are now set to go shopping-free for the next while).

Once the basics have been covered, new additions can be a little more playful, and a little less functional -- single-purpose garments that don't see a lot of use but look great when they're called for make good additions to a growing wardrobe.

We prefer to let a man's budget and taste determine the outer limits of his clothing collection, but a few common-sense tips will keep your wardrobe updates from growing wasteful or expensive:

Know your backstock before you go shopping.

If you already have a dozen white or white-based dress shirts, another one doesn't really add much to the closet even if it is particularly sharp-looking.

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There's nothing wrong with a little redundancy (it saves on laundry and general wear, if nothing else), but think twice before spending money on something that does the same thing as a lot of other clothes you own.

Keep the general goals of menswear in mind, especially when buying more trend-driven clothes.

Some fashions are well-designed to complement traditional styles and flatter the male figure, while others are dubious experiments that serve little purpose.

The clothing should always draw attention to you, fit comfortably, and work easily into a variety of outfits and styles.

Anything that doesn't may be better off left on the rack for a season or two to see if it lasts.

- Single-purpose garments that you know you'll have occasional need for make good additions when you have the opportunity.
- Good formalwear is a worthwhile investment for anyone who plans to wear a tuxedo more than once or twice in life, for example.
- Casual wear tends to get worn down faster than higher-quality clothing, and may need replacing more often.

This can be a good opportunity to experiment with styles that wouldn't usually make it into the daily wardrobe. Blue jeans make a good trial run for new trouser fits, and you can experiment with colors fairly harmlessly in your T-shirts and flannel or denim button-downs.

If you're looking for something new, add a "flavor" item or two to the wardrobe that borrows from iconic styles. Western hats and vests give an urban cowboy feel, sharp contrast and small-brimmed hats are the retro-hipster look, and so on.

These aren't items that are going to serve much everyday purpose, but when you feel like sporting a particular image they'll be handy to have.



How do you rebuild your wardrobe? [Click here](#) to watch.

Chapter 6: Common Stains & How to Remove Them

First Steps: Immediate Stain Care

The easiest way to deal with stained clothing is to avoid stains in the first place.

Ha! Just kidding. If you never spilled anything on yourself you wouldn't be reading this. Of course we're all going to deal with stains once in a while.

The most important thing, no matter what kind of stain you're dealing with, is to prevent the stain from setting.



"Setting" is an informal term that refers to the staining material forming a chemical bond with the fabric. At that point it is effectively permanent. Removing the discoloration will require removing the discolored fabric itself.

Sometimes you can remove a set stain by scrubbing until the stained fibers are worn off, leaving unstained ones visible; other times the stain is there unless you cut it out physically and patch.

Key Steps to Prevent Setting

Treat immediately with water, or with the proper solvent if it is available (different types of solvents are discussed below, but water is always better than nothing).

Avoid direct heat. Heat will speed most types of stains' bonding. Do not place stained clothing near radiant heat sources, and try to only use room temperature or lukewarm solvents.

Avoid pressure. Apply solvents gently, dabbing them onto the stain and letting them soak in rather than scrubbing forcefully.

If the stain occurs at home, you can go straight to treating it. If you're out and about, get to a restroom and dab water gently onto the stained area with tissue paper, paper towels, toilet paper, etc. until the stain is thoroughly saturated.

Yes, it will be more visible than just a small stain on its own will be, and yes, it's going to be uncomfortable. But it will prevent the stain from becoming permanent, saving you garment repair or replacement in the long run.

Detailed Stain Removal

Acting at once to prevent the stain from setting in is important -- but it's usually not the whole job. Most common stains won't be removed completely simply by dabbing some water on them and going about your business.

There are three basic steps toward effective stain removal, regardless of the nature of the stain:

- Select the appropriate solvent
- Use the appropriate application method
- Seek necessary after-care

For most household stains this doesn't require too much research or investment. Common commercial products (and even some basic food supplies) will treat a large percentage of stains.

It's simply a matter of knowing which product to put on the stain, and how to put it there without damaging the cloth.

Selecting the Appropriate Solvent

A "solvent" is something that dissolves another chemical. It has the same root as "solution," which is what gets produced: a liquid mixture of the solvent and the staining material. The goal is to get that mixture out of the cloth, removing the discoloration.

Picking the right solvent requires you to know two things: what will dissolve the stain in question, and what is safe to use on the cloth you're working with.

Cloth Requirements

Use the wrong product and you can end up damaging your cloth worse than the original stain. Most clothes are made from fairly sturdy materials, but they all have their strengths and weaknesses.

Always check the label! It's your best guide in most cases. If it doesn't provide any specific instructions, go by fabric type:

Cotton can endure soaking, drying, and heat (though you want to avoid the latter for most stains -- warm water is fine, but dry heat just sets the stain).

It's easy to bleach white cotton, but very hard on the fabric, so save chlorine bleaches for a last resort, and dilute them well.

The best stain treatments for cotton are detergents and light acids (lemon juice, vinegar, etc.).

Wool is much more heat-sensitive than cotton, and needs to be treated gently when it's wet as well. You can soak it, but you have to lay it flat as it dries to prevent distorting.

Use only wool-safe detergents and lukewarm (not hot) water -- bleaches and acidic treatments will damage the wool permanently.

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Treat with water or a wool detergent as soon as possible, and then get the garment to the dry cleaner's at the first opportunity.

Synthetics vary depending on the material. Rayon and polyester can be washed and scrubbed more harshly than cotton, but will be destroyed by oxidizing bleaches like hydrogen peroxide.

It's usually best to clean them with a standard laundry detergent, or with dish soap for grease-heavy stains.



Silk is exceedingly temperamental. You can treat stains on silk with water, but rather than letting the wet spot dry on its own, rinse the whole garment thoroughly -- otherwise you'll get water spotting, nearly as bad as the original stain. Glycerin stain remover is also effective and neutral.

No matter what you're using, test the stain remover on an inside patch of the cloth or an unobtrusive seam before applying it to the stain. Water is the only thing you can automatically apply -- and even then you should make sure that it's lukewarm or room temperature water, not hot or cold.

Types of Solvents (and the Stains They Remove)

Water is a good first step for every stain. After that, things get more complicated.

Following the instructions on the tag (or the fabric guidelines above) is a good way to make sure your solvent doesn't damage the garment, but that doesn't mean it'll have any effect on the stain.

Here are the major families of stain removers and solvents, and the kinds of stains they're most effective at cleaning:

Water

Universal, safe to use on basically everything, and cheap. Effective as an immediate treatment to prevent setting. Needs prolonged soaking to have much effect on grease/oil stains, but reduces the effect of dyes (lipstick, hair dye, bleed from other clothes, etc.) considerably. Usually not a 100% effective treatment all on its own.

Salt

Cheap and almost everyone has it. Can be applied on top of a wetted stain to give the chemicals something to leech into. Effective on sweat/deodorant armpit stains, red wine, and bloodstains.

Vinegar/Lemon Juice

Mild acids are great against coffee and tea, grass stains, and sticky residue stains like tape and glue marring.

Vinegar is also effective against mildew -- perfect for laundry that sat wet.



Detergent

Laundry and dish detergents are similar enough to use interchangeably in most situations.

Dish detergent is usually harsher, and may make very delicate fabrics delicate if you don't wash it out thoroughly. Both are particularly effective against grease stains, so use them on everything from gravy and burger juice to chocolate smears.

Oxidizing bleaches

Hydrogen peroxide is the most common example here.

They're effective at removing color, making them ideal for makeup stains, grass stains, and other pigment-based damage.

They're less effective against grease, and can damage delicate fabrics. Dilute as needed for a milder treatment.

Glycerin

A neutral, commercially available treatment that helps to draw stains out of fabrics. Good on ink and dye stains. Many commercial "stain sticks" are glycerin, or a combination of glycerin and detergent.

Mineral spirits

An intense treatment for very stubborn greases (asphalt/tar stains, etc.). Too strong for delicate fabrics. Wash the clothing thoroughly after treatment and air-dry.

Digestants/enzyme cleaners

Commercial products sold under a variety of names. Highly effective on organic stains, and on stains with an odor (egg yolk, pet urine, blood, sweat, etc.). Cannot be used on wool or silk -- the cleaner feeds on proteins, and both wool and silk are made from proteins.

Dry cleaning solvents

These are sold in a diluted form for home treatment of stains. Use them with caution -- you're rarely better off using commercially sold dry cleaning solution than you are taking the clothes to a professional dry cleaner's.

Chlorine bleaches

A harsh, last-ditch remedy. Use with caution. Can damage fabric and discolor non-white cloth. Always test a small, hidden area first, and that only if the tag does not say "No Bleach" or "Chlorine Free" on it.

Not all stains are going to give way easily to one kind of treatment. Nearly all benefit from a water soak beforehand, and some require multiple treatments for multiple problems: many lipsticks, for example, have both an oil component and a dye component.

In general, treat dyes before oils -- chocolate, for example, is best treated with a lukewarm water soak and then with a bit of detergent applied directly to the stain.

Applying Solvents

The right product applied the wrong way can set the stain in worse.

Most of the time this boils down to a very simple concept: never apply direct force. Dab gently or soak indirectly, rather than scrubbing with a cloth or your fingers.

That said, you can get better results if you use a series of steps designed specifically to draw the stain out of the fabric and into something else:

Soak the stain with water immediately. We've said it before, but it bears repeating. Always dab some room temperature water onto the stain with a bit of toilet paper or tissue as soon as possible. Make sure the whole stain gets soaked, and that the water soaks all the way through the fabric rather than just sitting on the surface.

When you remove the garment, re-wet the stain and apply an absorbent. Salt is the most common and cheapest, but some people use cornstarch or talcum powder for a similar effect.

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This works best on smooth fabrics like cotton knits -- applying salt to a wooly tweed jacket is just going to be a pain to scrape off later. Let the absorbent sit for ten or fifteen minutes, then scrape the bulk of it off and rinse the rest out with water. This gives the stain a medium to soak into.

Apply your solvent lightly to the back of the garment, beneath the stain. You want it to be soaking through and driving the stain back toward the surface, not deeper into the garment.

Applying it to the inside also gives you a little more security in case the solvent ends up discoloring the fabric (but you checked first on an unobtrusive area like we told you to, right?)

Lay the garment face down on a clean paper towel. Like the absorbent, this gives the chemicals that are actually causing the stain something to soak into.

If you don't provide that blank medium, all you're really doing is spreading the chemical out so thin that it's not immediately visible -- it's still there in the cloth. The paper towel gives it somewhere else to go.

Let the garment rest face down on the paper towel for an hour or so. Different solvents have different reaction times, but give it a while.



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The only real guideline here is to get back for your final rinse before the solvent dries completely.

Keep an eye on it. If it all dries out, you may just end up with a bigger, lighter-colored stain than before, caused by the solvent diluting and spreading the stain and then drying in place.

Give the garment a final water rinse to remove both the stain and the solvent. If you can, immediately wash it, either in a laundry machine or by taking it in for dry cleaning.

Some stains can be removed simply by a wash or a dry cleaning, but it's best to apply the specific treatment as well, so long as you have a solvent that will not damage the cloth. In the case of delicate wools or silks that may mean nothing but water -- but the water is better than nothing.



After Care

Most stains are manageable if you wet them right away and treat them as outlined above as soon as possible. A few very stubborn ones may require multiple treatments.

Even if a treatment appears to have worked completely, however, go ahead and give the entire garment a final cleaning as your after care.

Take wools, silks, and other delicate fabrics to a professional cleaner's. Launder sturdy cottons a couple times in a wash on their own -- if there's any residual chemicals left, you don't want them bleeding onto other things.

10 Common Stains and Their Treatments

To give you a few examples of how to use the knowledge above, here are ten of the most common stains a man can expect to encounter.

These could affect everything from his grungy work jeans to his best business suit.

Always take the type of cloth into account, and seek professional cleaning if you're not sure what you can and can't apply -- it's a lot cheaper to pay \$10 for a professional's help than it is to replace a suit because you used the wrong cleaner on it!

But if you have your heart set on home cleaning, here's how to tackle these common foes:

Bloodstains

Rinse immediately with cool water.

If possible, immerse in room temperature water with detergent and let soak for 10-15 minutes. Spot-treat with an enzyme cleaner if possible, or with household ammonia. Launder in a separate load.



Butter/Lard/Cooking Oil

Treat immediately with lukewarm water. If possible, immerse in warm water with detergent, using a spray or stick pre-treatment if available.

Remove and gently dab stain with detergent; place face down on a paper towel and let stand. Repeat as needed.

For persistent stains, carefully apply bleach or dry cleaning solvent from the inside of the garment and rest face down on paper towels, then wash thoroughly.

Coffee

Soak immediately with lukewarm water. Gently dab stain with detergent or with vinegar diluted in water.

Wash in the hottest water recommended for the fabric and repeat as needed. Avoid bar or powder soap, which can set the stain permanently.

Sweat/Armpit Stains and Collar Yellowing

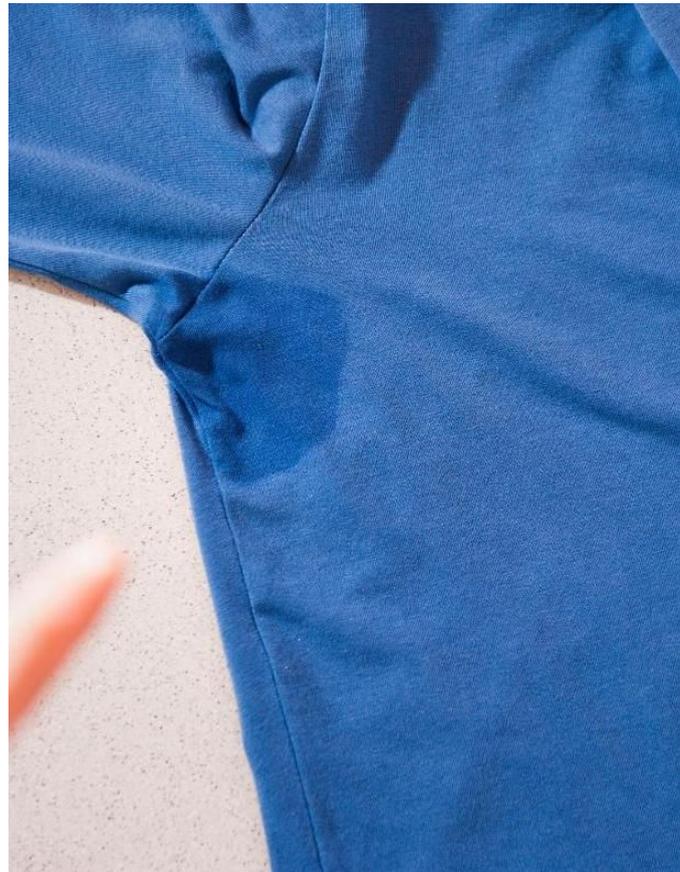
Wash with hot water and detergent. If yellowing persists, soak in warm water and let stand with a dusting of salt, or apply an enzyme cleaner.

Bleach can be used to remove staining on whites as a last-ditch solution.

Lipstick

Wet and place face-down on a paper towel. Sponge gently with detergent and wash out with warm water.

Apply glycerin if stain persists. Repeat as needed.



Engine Grease/Machine Oil

Treat immediately with warm water. As soon as possible, soak in warm water with heavy-duty detergent. Remove, treat stained area with detergent directly, and lay face-down on paper towels. Launder separately. Repeat as needed.

Mud/Dirt

Soak and agitate (shake around) in lukewarm water to remove as much as possible. Apply detergent to remaining stains and let soak for 20-30 minutes.

Rinse and repeat. Launder normally, and treat any remaining stains with bleach if possible.

Wine

Treat immediately with warm water. Salt stain and let stand if possible. Rinse salt out, dab gently with detergent or glycerin, and lay face down on a paper towel. Rinse again and launder normally.

Avoid bar or flake soaps, which can set the stain permanently.

Urine and Feces

Remove and rinse immediately in cool water. Avoid heat, which can set the proteins permanently. Soak and agitate in cool water with detergent.

Drain and soak again, letting stand for 20-30 minutes. Launder immediately. Bleach if necessary, but rewash afterward in the case of diapers -- bleach is too harsh for babies' skin.

Odors

For odors that persist through a normal laundering, apply calcium carbonate crystals or activated charcoal and let stand for several hours (or several days, as needed).

Shake off and use a gentle hand vacuum to clean residue. If there is a visible stain along with the odor, use an enzyme cleaner.

These are all good examples that you can apply to other stains as well.

Chocolate, for example, is just a combination of oil and a dye, very much like lipstick, and can be treated similarly.

Conclusion: Immediate Action is the Best Product!

Nothing treats a stain as well as immediate action.

Get some room temperature water on it right away and you're doing well. If you know for sure what temperatures are ideal for the particular stain (hot water helps break up grease stains, for example, but will set protein stains like blood permanently), then go for it -- but if you're not sure, lukewarm won't hurt anything.

Once you've got the stain thoroughly soaked, you can take the time to look up the appropriate treatment, or get it to a professional cleaner's.

Don't be a hero, and don't damage expensive clothing by trying elaborate home remedies when one commercial product or one trip to the dry cleaner's will take care of everything.

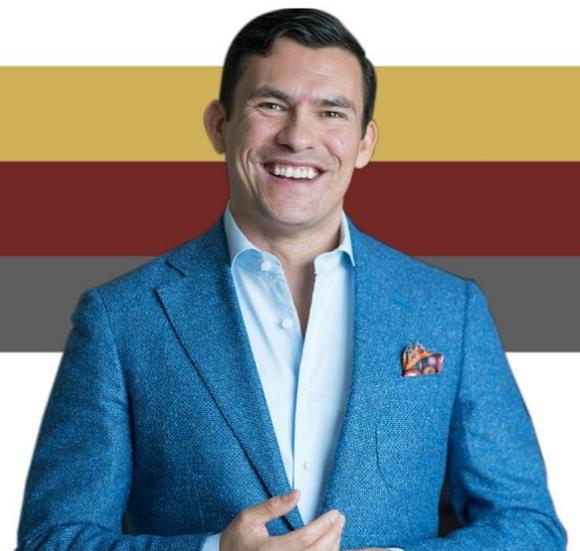
And soak the stain first. Seriously.

In what ways are you killing clothes? [Click here to watch the video.](#)



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Chapter 7: Winter Clothing Storage & Care

Winter weather changes both your wardrobe and the damaging factors it can be exposed to. Be prepared to make a few adjustments in your clothing care!

A minute or two of extra attention can save a hundred-dollar-plus investment like a suit or a good pair of shoes from permanent damage.

Public Footwear Enemy #1: Road Salt

The most damaging change that comes with winter is the appearance of road salt and other thawing chemicals on the streets and sidewalks.



These are hard to avoid, especially in urban areas. Very few towns have strict regulations -- in most places, businesses can use anything from pure salt to blue alkaline crystals to try and keep their sidewalks clean. Almost none of them are good for your footwear.

Water (and its frozen forms, snow and ice) isn't actually that hard on leather, on its own. As long as you've been good about polishing and conditioning your shoes regularly, you don't have too much to fear from pure snow and slush.

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What will be damaging is slush with road dirt, salt, and chemical melt all mixed together.

Remember that the leather is skin -- just as your skin would be damaged from having chunks of dirt and harsh chemicals rubbed into it, so too will your shoes be damaged. Salt stains are permanent, and go beyond just discoloring your shoe; the harshness of the chemical mixture will also dry, crack, and warp the leather, shortening its lifespan irreparably.

Avoid salt damage by cleaning leather shoes immediately in the winter!

The easiest way to avoid any kind of salt or chemical damage is to give leather shoes a wipe every time you come in from the snowy outside. Use a pocket handkerchief, a paper towel, a rag, or just a bit of toilet paper from the men's room in a pinch, but get the slick of snowmelt off the leather. It's almost certain to contain damaging runoff as well as plain old water.



Winter is also a good time to be more rigorous in your conditioning and polishing routine. Wearing shoes in the snow and then taking them into warm buildings creates a cycle of soaking and drying that can cause the leather fibers to swell and split if they haven't been conditioned with oil.

Conditioner keeps the leather supple, and regular polishing gives an extra layer of protection that keeps most of the wet and dirt from ever soaking in. Conditioning once or twice throughout the winter should be plenty; polishing should be more of a monthly or even bi-weekly habit depending on how regularly you're wearing your shoes.

Winter Wools and Fabric Moths

Fabric moths are the enemy of all wool clothing.

More specifically, their larvae are -- the moths themselves are harmless, once hatched, but they love to lay their eggs in wool and other natural hairs and fibers, and the larvae that hatch from the eggs live on the fibers themselves.

The result for us is holes in the weave that can't be fixed.

Winter is not a time of safety from fabric moths. If anything, it's a great time for them -- the garments they like to nest in are warm and protected all winter long.

The cold outside is no protection for clothes while they're hung up, and even if you do take them outside it's unlikely to do much.

A woman named Judith McKenzie did a formal study of freezing effects on moth eggs, and found that the temperatures needed to effectively kill the eggs are well beyond what most commercial freezers can sustain, and need to be maintained much longer than any of us will stay outside in the bitter cold.



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All wool and natural-fiber clothes are at risk. Rarely-used ones are moths' favorites, so check suits that don't see much use or old, mostly-discarded scarves particularly closely.

You don't want one forgotten stocking cap in the corner of the closet to become the start of an infestation that spreads to your good suits.

Moth prevention requires careful storage and treatment:

- Dry clean all your wool and hair clothes before storing them for long periods. Dry cleaning kills moth eggs and larvae effectively.
- Seal rarely-worn clothing in bags with a moth repellent (either a natural oil like lavender or cedar, or the conventional "mothballs" made from PDB or similar chemicals).
- Regularly-worn clothing like suits or jackets can be protected with a quick brushing when you take the garment off and storage with some space between it and any other clothes.
- Hang all wool items with space between them to prevent the spread of larvae or eggs.
- Vacuum the closet floor and baseboards. Dust often includes human and pet hairs, which encourages moths to settle and lay eggs in dusty environments. A clean closet is a much more moth-proof closet.

Most mothballs contain hazardous chemicals, including neurotoxin, so always be sure to store them well out of reach of children.



Water Damage, Mildew, and Other Winter Hazards

Apart from road salts and moths, the biggest wardrobe danger of winter is its natural tendency to be wet.

Winter clothes get wetter than summer clothes, typically speaking -- there's snow and ice melt from the ground, frequent precipitation from the sky, and sweat from wearing layers of heavy clothing. The end result is clothes that spend a lot of time being damp.

Damp has two main dangers: it can damage the shape of the clothing, and it can encourage mold and mildew growth.

Mold and Mildew

Tiny organisms that grow in damp places -- and there are a whole host of them -- aren't always noticeable, but can have serious respiratory effects on human beings. Mold spores are a very common allergen, and can thrive in winter, especially on under layers that are protected from cold even when worn outside.

To avoid mildew and mold growth, make sure your clothes are being washed regularly and thoroughly dried before storage. Slightly damp T-shirts or underwear in a warm, enclosed drawer are an excellent breeding ground for common molds.

Anything that has a slightly "stuffy" odor to it has probably started developing mold or mildew. Send it through the washer to deal with the smell, and the dryer on a "hot" cycle to thoroughly kill any living spores. Wool clothing can be dry cleaned for the same effect.

Are You Ready to Take Action?

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Storing Wet Clothing

Wet suits, jackets, and trousers made of wool can't be dried in most conventional dryers, meaning they have to be air-dried if you take them off damp.

The big danger there is that wool loses its elasticity when wet. It's very easy to distort a wool garment when it's wet. Creases will become permanent and stretching stays in place after the garment dries. Unfortunately, direct heat will also damage the wool, breaking the fibers and turning the whole garment brittle.

Therefore, the best way to dry wool is with a lot of patience and a little flat space:

- Lay the garment flat on a soft surface like a bed or covered ironing board.
- Carefully tug the edges out to smooth any creases
- Let the garment thoroughly air-dry before folding or hanging

If you must hang a wool jacket while wet, make sure to use a thick wooden hanger with a natural shoulder-shaped curve, rather than an angular wire hanger. The jacket may still stretch slightly downward, due to the tug of its own weight, but at least the shoulders won't distort.



Chapter 8: Summer Clothing Storage & Care

Summer wardrobes are lighter and more limited than what's often called the "three-season" wardrobe.

A lot of our garments tend to go into storage, sometimes for several months.

That long-term storage requires a little extra care -- a few minutes of thought and preparation that can save you a lot of clothing damage in the long run.

Long-Term Storage: Moths, Mildew, and More

The clothing that you wear every day during the summer is actually less susceptible to damage than the stuff you put aside. Unworn clothing, especially wools, are vulnerable to damage when they're left for long periods.

Moths

By far the biggest worry for stored wools is moths, specifically moth larvae. Clothing moths love to lay their eggs in natural hairs like wool. The eggs hatch, and the newborn larvae feast on the fibers, creating holes in your clothing.

Garments that are being worn regularly are unlikely to harbor moth eggs. Moths like quiet, dusty, untroubled locations -- which, unfortunately, describes many people's closets and drawers.

One infested garment can easily spread to others, so store anything that you know you aren't going to wear for the summer in a moth-proof fashion:

- Keep wool items in separate, sealed plastic bags (most dry cleaners will sell you these for a few bucks each).
- Include either mothballs or a natural moth repellent like cedar wood or lavender oil in each bag.



- Keep your storage space clean -- moths also lay eggs in dust, where human and pet hairs provide food for the larvae. If they're nesting in the corners of the closet, it's not far to nesting in the clothes themselves.
- Dry clean all items before bagging and storing them. Dry cleaning effectively kills any eggs laid in the fabric. Other methods (freezing, mothballs, etc.) are not necessarily 100% effective on their own.

A few extra steps can save a major investment here -- one ratty scarf in the back of the closet can easily turn into thousands of dollars of ruined suits if you aren't careful with your off-season storage.

Again, suits and jackets that are being worn regularly are at far less risk than ones in prolonged, unused storage.

Exert yourself most on behalf of your least-worn clothing.

Mildew and Mold

Items stored wet are prone to mildew or mold growth. This is a double threat: mold spores can be hazardous to human respiration, and the growth cannibalizes the fabric itself, weakening fibers and eventually creating holes and irreparable staining.

Fortunately, most mildew and mold damage is easy to avoid: simply make sure that all items, regardless of fabric type, are completely dried before you store them in a drawer or closet.

Be extra sure to let items going into a sealed bag dry all the way, as there will be nowhere for moisture to go once you seal the container.

If you live in a humid environment, take the extra precaution of including desiccants with anything you plan to store unused for a long period of time.

Just airing the garment until completely dry is fine for short-term storage, but a jacket you're putting up for the summer should get a packet of desiccant (or, in a pinch, a few large grains of rice) in the pockets.

Light Damage

A final consideration for any long-term storage is light: sunlight is damaging to both the strength of some fibers and the color of most dyes.

Garment bags like you get from a dry cleaner's are typically opaque to prevent any light damage. Just a closed closet door is usually ample, so long as there's no window. It's not like a few hours in the sun will ruin your good suits -- they'd be useless for actual wear if that were the case -- but an unused garment that hangs in direct sunlight for months on end will start to fade and become brittle.

Summer Garment Care

The flip side of your summer wardrobe care is the maintenance of the clothes you're actually wearing.

Light wools, cotton, linen, and synthetics make up most men's summer wardrobe, with an emphasis on linen and cotton in particular.

Mildew and Mold

Like garments in long-term storage, the biggest danger to your day-to-day wear is fungal growth of one sort or another. Lots of things like to live in damp cloth, and when you add in human sweat as a food source (and who doesn't sweat at least a little during the summer?) you've got a the start of a truly thriving colony.

That's gross and also damaging, so take the simple step of washing your clothes with soap (to get rid of the sweat and the bacteria that feeds on it) and drying them thoroughly (to prevent mold or mildew growth in your drawers).

Dark storage is also helpful here, such as a closed closet with no windows or a chest of drawers, which protects your clothes from sunlight and limits the growth of some species of mold. If you do notice a faint "musty" smell in any of your drawers, give everything in it a wash and a thorough dry to keep the colony from spreading.

Sweat Stains

A little bit of sweating is unavoidable in the summer. Most of the time it won't damage the clothes, as long as you're good about washing them promptly.

What we think of as the stereotypical "armpit stains" -- big, yellowish rings under the arms of a light-colored shirt -- are actually caused by sweat reacting with the aluminum used in some antiperspirants.

The easiest way to avoid them is to simply get a deodorant or antiperspirant that doesn't contain aluminum. Not all brands label themselves clearly, however, so if you do find yourself getting yellow armpit stains, wash the shirt separately with bleach to get them out. There are also commercial stain removers designed specifically to break apart the yellowing caused by antiperspirant and sweat, which are useful for patterned and non-white stained shirts that would be damaged by bleach.

Creasing

A final issue with the summer wardrobe is simply the ease with which it creases. Light cotton wrinkles fairly easily, and linen is even more prone to creasing.

Cotton can be tumble-dried to shake out most wrinkles, and ironed when it needs to be extra-crisp.

Linen, on the other hand, is easily damaged by heat, and should usually be line dried or dried with no heat.

If you're a regular linen wearer, learn to accept a bit of subtle creasing as part of the look -- it suits the breezy, summer style, and shows off the uniqueness of the material as well.

Light wool slacks and jackets also tend to wrinkle more easily than their heavier, three-season counterparts.

You can press wool if you're careful and follow the directions on your iron, but it's often safer and easier to take them to the dry cleaner's, where you can have them both cleaned and pressed for a few dollars.

Chapter 9: How to Properly Iron A Dress Shirt

I can't count the number of times I've seen a man who's wearing what would be a very dapper get-up....except it's ruined by wrinkly clothes.

I see this especially with young, single professional men who probably don't have mom or a wife to iron their clothes for them and never learned this basic life skill for themselves.

The fact is a lot of grown men don't know how to iron a shirt. It's nothing to be ashamed of if you don't know how.

Growing up, dear old mom probably ironed your dress shirts whenever you needed one and now your wife does this chore.

But a man needs to be self-sufficient. He shouldn't have to rely on somebody else to ensure that he looks presentable.

He's in charge of that. If an unexpected interview or date comes up, a man knows how to get ready and out the door looking like a million bucks.

Details matter when it comes to your appearance and making a good first impression. Wrinkles draw the eye of those you meet and make you look sloppy and out-of-sorts.

Having well-pressed clothing shows the world that you're a man of discipline and order, a man who has his stuff together and understands that the details matter. And a crisp shirt really pulls together a handsome outfit.

Throw on a well-ironed shirt, and you get a bit of confident pep in your step; it just feels good.



Ironing isn't hard when you get the hang of it. You can get a shirt done in less than 5 minutes. And boom—you're ready to take on the world.

Today we're going to give you the ins and outs of fast, effective ironing.

If you don't really know how to iron a dress shirt, here's your primer.

And if you're already pretty adept at this chore, you'll probably find some great tips you never thought of before.

So let's get started by talking about the tools of the trade.

The 6 Tools of Effective Ironing

Tool #1: The Iron

How do you identify a quality iron? A well-built soleplate – To play on words, this is the soul of the iron. You want something that is solid, smooth, and clean if buying used.

You'll find sole plates made from solid steel, titanium coated, and cast iron with aluminum, to name three solid options.

Avoid new irons under \$20, as this is where low cost manufacturers most often skimp on the product to keep costs low.

A poor quality soleplate will not clean well and may have uneven heat distribution—which leads to shirts being damaged.

High heat capability – Most consumer irons range in power consumption from 420 watts (small travel irons) to 1800 watts (higher end models above \$100).

The power consumption plays into the amount of heat produced by the iron, although there isn't always a direct relationship as the size of the soleplate needing to be heated factors in as well.

But generally speaking, a 1800 watt iron is going to be hotter than a 1200 watt one, and it will heat up faster.

Why the need for heat? Certain fabrics, cotton and linen being two of them, require high heat to reform their shape.

A hotter iron can cut ironing time in half, vs. one that forces you to pass and remain on the same part of the garment for 45 seconds.

Also, steam production relies on the soleplate's temperature and higher temps produce steadier steam.

Steam delivery system – You want steam as it breathes life into fabrics and the hot moisture enables the toughest wrinkles to smooth out with minimal work by more evenly distributing the heat through the garment fibers.

Steam irons under \$20 often have their steam component built in as an afterthought and sputter and spit out water when you don't want it. Higher end models have 300+ holes that deliver a clean, uniform mist.

Depending on your needs you'll want the best steam delivery system you can budget. Why? A good steam iron can be used indirectly on wools and other more delicate fabrics and save you thousands a year in pressing and dry cleaning costs in addition to what I mentioned above.

Size and Weight – Size and weight do become issues for those who deal with arthritis or are sensitive to weight differences of a few pounds.

Thus expensive irons made from lightweight space-age materials are not necessarily better because they cost more—they simply are being made for a different customer. So don't always equate price with quality.

Special Note – Travel Irons

For the sharp dressed road warrior a travel iron is a wise investment.

Although hotels normally have an iron and board available for guest use, this isn't always the case, especially at hotels that are either budget or are trying to encourage use of their expensive in-house cleaning services.



Having your own iron enables you to use a device you're familiar with and prepare your clothing on your schedule as you see fit.

No ironing board? Grab a towel and throw it on a flat surface—it will do the job. Lightweight, small, easy to carry and dependable are the keys to a good travel iron.

Personally I recommend [Steamfast's compact travel iron](#). It is incredibly small, lightweight, hot, produces a decent amount of steam, and is value priced.

However what impressed me most was the great customer service I recently received from this American business.

I was having mechanical problems (or so I thought—turns out I didn't know how to use it properly) and thought it was going to be a hassle to exchange it as I had waited 8 months to report the problem.

Instead, I spoke with a very nice customer service rep who resolved my issue and within minutes shipped me a new one—no questions asked. You have to love that!

Tool # 2: The Ironing Board

You need something that's sturdy and has a top that you're comfortable ironing on.

I advise you see what's available for free as many people have an old one lying around—and then spend the money on a nice cover and pad.

You can also put a piece of aluminum foil under the ironing board cover—the idea here is to reflect the iron's heat back on itself so you're actually ironing from both sides at once.

Be careful though as it will increase the speed in which you can burn the clothing.

Tool #3: Spray Bottle

Do not reuse a container that housed a cleaning agent.

You'll use this spray bottle to disperse water evenly over your shirt before ironing in the case your iron is not equipped with a steam function or when you're ironing in bulk (as I will show you).

It's also handy for when you're ironing a wrinkle—give the spot a spray and then iron out the wrinkle seconds later.

Tool #4: Water

You want to use water free of small dirt and high concentrations of calcium and magnesium, both common in hard water. Long term use can lead to iron damage and leave marks on dress shirt fabrics that are hard to remove.

However, you do not need to use distilled water as some mineral presence is good as it acts as a wetting agent and helps water better vaporize when it contacts the soleplate.

If this doesn't motivate you to iron, I don't know what will.

Tool #5: A Light-Colored Cotton Towel

A towel can be used as a ironing board pad, rolled and used inside sleeves as a makeshift sleeve-board, or simply to clean up excess water sprayed on the shirt.

Tool #6: Spray Starch (Optional)

I remember in the Marines using cans of spray starch in an effort to get the perfect "crisp" look; however, just as often I would overdue it and be dealing with flakes due to over starching or not letting it set in.

To use starch, understand it is best used in moderation and with a temperature setting of 6 or below (the highest setting can cause flaking).

Too much and you can make a normally breathable cotton shirt feel like a synthetic plastic bag and cause more wrinkles when worn!

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FYI – a man can make his own starch spray by dissolving one tablespoon of cornstarch in two cups water. Using a spray bottle (preferably not the water one—clearly mark it “spray starch”) you can then LIGHTLY mist the fabric a minute before ironing.



Difference between a steamer and an iron? [Click here](#) to watch.



Chapter 10: How To Iron A Shirt

For these instructions I assume you are ironing a batch of five (5) 100% cotton dress shirts with an iron setting of five to six (depending on your iron).

If you're seeking a super crisp look, you'll want to first turn the shirt inside out and iron the inside and then iron the outside of the shirt.

This will add another two minutes onto the process, but will give you better results, especially on thicker cotton fabrics.

If you use the aluminum foil trick though, you can skip this.

Preparation

Read the shirt's label. Really, you need to understand what type of fabric the shirt is made from before ironing it or you could possibly destroy it.

Most shirts are made from cotton or cotton blends and can withstand high temps, although polyester shirt fabrics are more fragile to heat. If you're unsure, start with a low setting such as 3 and then move up until the shirt starts to respond to the iron's heat.

Note: Silk and wool shirts are not covered here. Although it is possible to clean them yourself, you need to know what you're doing.

You want the shirts to be moist (not soaking wet). This will enable you to dry iron without having to worry about your iron's steam function.



Ideally you have recently pulled the shirts from the washing machine; if they are already dry, however, just take them and thoroughly mist them with the spray bottle.

Once finished, place them in a plastic bag to better diffuse the moisture and prevent evaporation. Next set up the ironing board near a power outlet that is close to the closet where you'll be hanging everything immediately after ironing.

Ensure the iron has water in it and then plug it in, set to the lowest heat setting you'll need. Store all of your ironing equipment together, that way you're never looking for anything when you need it quickly.

Within 5 minutes the iron should be ready and all the shirts moistened. Pull the lightest weight shirt from the bag first, making sure it is evenly wet. If not, spray on a bit more water.

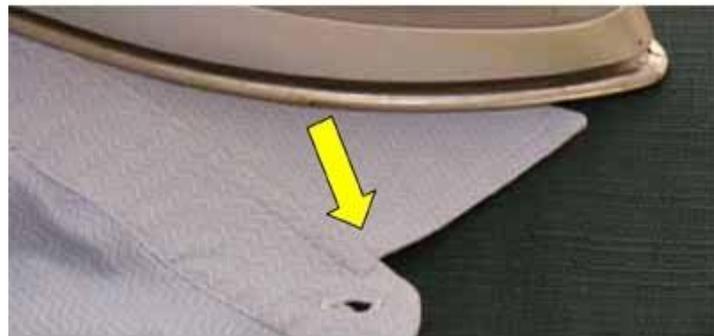
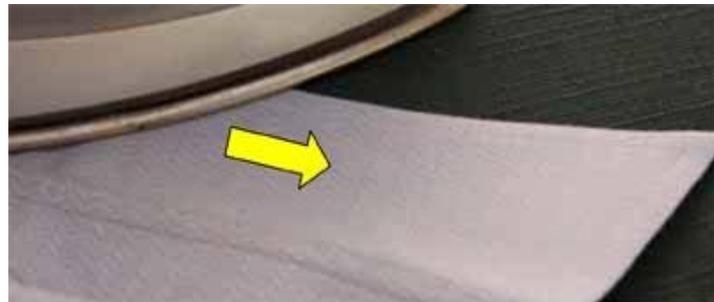
1. Iron the Collar First

Always start by ironing your dress shirt collar. This is the most visible part of a shirt as it frames the face, especially when worn with a suit or sport jacket.

In a pinch and when wearing a jacket, you can get away with ironing only your collar, the front area right below it, and your cuffs. Just don't take off your jacket!

To iron the shirt collar, pop it up and start with the underside, slowly pressing the iron from one point to the other.

Ensure that it is thoroughly moist before starting, and if any wrinkles appear, press them to the bottom where they'll be less visible. Next, flip the shirt over and repeat this process on the outside of the collar.



2. Next Iron the Cuffs

As mentioned above, I iron the cuffs next as they receive a lot of attention when worn properly with a jacket. To iron a shirt cuff, first unbutton it (to include the gauntlet button) and lay it out flat. First iron the inside of the cuff, and next the outside, moving all wrinkles from uneven fabric to the edges.

Carefully iron around the buttons, and even on the backside. Never iron over buttons (unless you place them over a towel or something with give) as they can leave a mark.

For French cuffs, open them fully and iron as above. I recommend you not press the edges of a French cuff—it steals the life and body from a smooth fold.



3. Ironing the Shirt Front

Start with the side that has buttons and carefully work the iron point around the button area (never over the buttons).

Then move back up to the top of the shoulder and work your way down the shirt with the iron.

Repeat on the other side, and if you have a placket, press the material under it with the iron point and then over the top.

It's worth spending a bit more time on the front placket and areas near the collar as they receive a high percentage of visual attention.



4. Iron the Back of the Shirt

Laying the shirt flat on the board, I like to position one of the sleeve heads into the square edge of the ironing board.

You then have half the back in prime position to be ironed, and only need to slide the shirt over to complete the other half.

Start at the top with the yoke (back shoulder area) and slowly slide the iron down. If you have a center box pleat, you'll have to spend a few seconds ironing around it—I prefer not to iron back in the pleat, as the time required for an area you don't want to highlight isn't worth the effort.

5. Iron the Sleeves

I choose to iron sleeves last as of all the parts of the shirt, they can be ironed in the widest variety of ways and for most men are the trickiest part of the shirt.

Problems arise from the fact that unless you have a sleeve board, you'll be ironing two layers of fabric. Thus the key to ironing sleeves is to be sure the fabric is flat and smooth BEFORE you apply the iron.

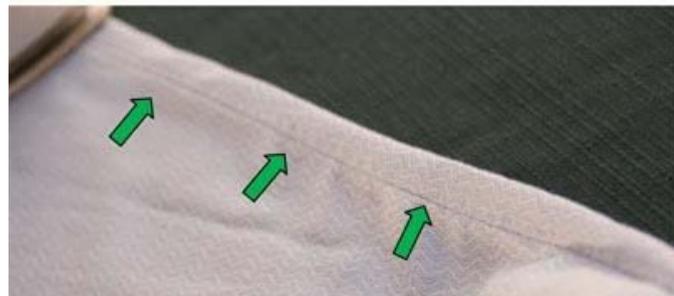
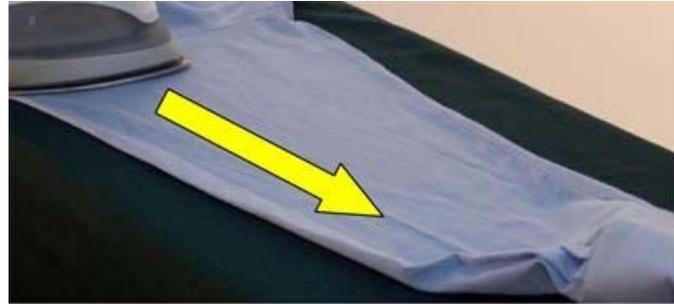
Take either sleeve by the seam and lay the whole sleeve (and most of the shirt) flat on the ironing board.

If you can see the creases on the top of the sleeve from previous ironing, match it again so that you have a single crease line.

Start ironing at the top where the sleeve is sewn onto the shirt and work your way down to the cuff. Turn the sleeve over and iron, then repeat the process with the other sleeve.

If you don't have a sleeve board and would rather your shirt sleeve not have a crease, insert a rolled-up towel into the sleeve. This will allow you to iron it without leaving a crease mark.

The bottom picture shows you the shirt sleeve seam – use this as a guide when laying the sleeve flat.



6. Inspect & Hang

Inspect the shirt and spot iron where necessary. Finally, place the shirt on a hanger and in your closet.

Three Warnings

1. If you are not sure of the shirt's fiber type, err on the side of caution and iron it with a lower setting. You can always increase the temperature...but you cannot fix heat damaged fabric.
2. Iron around buttons, never over them. Even if there is fabric laying over the button, as in the case of a pocket with under-buttons or a dress shirt with a hidden button down collar. You can create a permanent impression that will ruin the look of the shirt. Be sure to remove shirt stays as well.
3. Never iron a dirty shirt—you'll set the stains, and it will be very difficult if not impossible to remove them.

If all else fails call your mother.

Clean Your Iron's Water Reservoirs

If you use tap water in your iron, you'll eventually have a build-up of mineral deposits. This will be most noticeable when your steam output comes to a crawl.

To clean the reservoir, pour a solution of 1 part water, 1 part white vinegar into the water reservoir. Heat the iron normally and let it steam for a few minutes before unplugging and placing it soleplate down on a heat resistant dish that has room for the draining water.

An hour later drain and repeat with water—repeat the process if needs be.

Finally, rinse and refill with bottled drinking water or non-hard tap water.

Final Quick Ironing Tips

- If you're looking for supplies and want quality equipment that will last decades, shop where your tailors and dry cleaners shop. North Carolina's B&G Lieberman is a great supplier of all things tailor or cleaner-related; I called them just the other day, and their 86 year old founder still answers the phone! You'll find anything from quality buttons to suit brushes to industrial strength steam irons through them.

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- Iron your shirts in batches. Ironing a shirt only takes a few minutes, but half of that time is taken up with preparation—getting the ironing board set up, the iron filled and hot, etc. So use your time more effectively by ironing all your shirts in one batch instead of whenever you need one.
- If you're ironing a large number of shirts or other articles of clothing, start with the garments needing the lowest temperature. Then move to the garments (cotton and linens) that require the highest temperatures. The reasoning is that it takes an iron longer to cool off than heat up, and it decreases the likelihood of damage to your clothing.
- If you dry your shirts in a clothing dryer, pull them out before they are fully dry. Better yet, don't even place them in a dryer and instead put them on a wood hanger and iron them right out from the washing machine. No need to moisten or use any steam.
- If you literally have no time to iron then at least throw the shirt in the dryer (assuming you've dried it like this before) while you throw on the rest of your clothing. Five minutes tumbling in the warm air will help to loosen some of the worst wrinkles.
- If you're going to pack your dress shirts for a week's worth of travel, don't waste your time ironing the shirts beforehand. Pack them normally and allot 15 minutes upon arrival to iron them when you arrive in your hotel room.
- Anytime you are using a questionable iron that may leave marks, turn the shirt inside out and iron the backside only. It won't give the shirt as crisp a look, but the difference is negligible and any marks will be invisible once the shirt is turned back out correctly.
- Pay attention to the condition of the ironing board cover and pad – if it looks like it could leave any type of mark or you can feel metal underneath, cover it with a cotton towel or look for another board.

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- Make sure your iron has an auto-shutoff. Although most modern household irons do, some of the older models floating around do not. You want the peace of mind knowing that even if you forgot to turn off the iron this morning you're not going to start a fire.
- To produce steam, make sure you are using the iron at its highest setting. If you are using it at anything below the middle setting, water will often drip or trail. If you need to iron on low and need moisture, this is where the spray bottle really comes in handy. If you don't need moisture, make sure to set the adjustable steam to "off" and don't press the steam blast button.
- Always empty the water from your iron while the iron is hot. This will reduce the moisture that remains in the water compartment. Doing this will also ensure you unplug the iron before leaving the house.

- The End -

...or is it just the **beginning of your style journey?**

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See you on the other side!