

IN THIS ISSUE:

A Guide to Home Stain Removal

Home Stain Removal Remedies: Fact or Fiction

Optimum Brighteners

What is French Cleaning?

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Clothes Care Gazette is published monthly by the International Fabricare Institute at 12251 Tech Road, Silver Spring, MD 20904 (301) 622-1900. All rights reserved. © 2000 International Fabricare Institute. When reprinting or paraphrasing IFI materials, please reference IFI, the Association of Professional Drycleaners, Wetcleaners and Launderers.

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The Association of
Professional Drycleaners,
Wetcleaners, and Launderers

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GAZETTE

No. 155

A PUBLICATION FOR THE CONSUMER ADVISOR

Published by the  International Fabricare Institute

A Guide to

HOME STAIN REMOVAL

No matter where you are — in the yard, in the kitchen or at the gas station — unsightly stains lurk. They are unavoidable. They can happen when you go out to eat (a small pasta sauce stain on your sleeve or elbow, a larger stain on your shirt or blouse, a spilled drink running onto your lap); at work (an ink stain on your pants); and at home (a grease stain on your sleeve while cooking).

Often people get stains on their clothes at the most inopportune times — like when you spill salad dressing on your shirt during lunch before a big meeting. Naturally, a person's first reaction is to get the stain out immediately, if for no other reason than to avoid looking like a slob. He or she is probably also concerned about the stain setting, and so, for better or worse, a series of home remedy techniques ensue.

There are many things that can be done to treat a garment temporarily, but there also is a lot of things you can do wrong. This article is designed to educate consumers about home stain removal.

Some Fundamentals

Stains should be treated as soon as possible to avoid damage to the fabric. The longer a stain remains in a fabric the more difficult it is to remove. Stains can also attract insects, which can result in further fabric damage.

Professional cleaners have the skills and tools that enable them to remove most stains from your clothes. However, small clothing stains can often be successfully removed at home. If you are not sure what the stain is or have doubts about the fabric, you should take the garment to your cleaner. You should also forego home stain removal when the stains are numerous or cover a large area, or they require a chemical procedure for which you are not equipped. Remember to point out any stains and identify what they are when you go to the cleaner.

When doing stain removal at home, work slowly and check your work frequently throughout the procedure. Be aware that a stain may behave differently depending on the fiber content, dye, finish, and construction of the fabric. If you have any doubts about removing a stain, take it to your cleaner. On "Dry Clean Only" items, blot up as much of the staining material as you can and then take it a professional cleaner as soon as possible. ►

◀ Dry-side and Wet-side Stains

Depending on the type, stains require either dry-side or wet-side stain removal treatment, or a combination of the two. “Dry-side” stain removal agents come in the form of cleaning fluids or powders. They do not contain any water. Therefore, they are effective on oil-based stains, but will have no impact on stains that have to be dissolved in water. Consumers can purchase many solvent-based products at their local supermarket. When working with cleaning fluids or powders follow the directions carefully.

The following stains should receive dry-side stain removal: rouge, mascara, foundation, ballpoint ink, rubber base adhesives, cooking oils and greases, oil and tar, candle wax, and salad oil and dressing.

“Wet-side” stains are water-based. Consequently, it takes some form of water to remove these stains. Examples of wet-side stains include soft drinks, milk, ice cream, wine, coffee, tea, mustard, grass, and most food stains.

Some stains dissolve partially in cleaning fluid and partially in water. Lipstick is an example of this. It contains wax and dye. The wax is removed through dry-side stain removal, and the dye is removed via wet-side treatment. When doing both, always do the “dry” procedure first. Make sure the wax is removed fully before proceeding to the “wet” procedure. Other items that require both dry and wet treatment include shoe polish, gravy, paint, and salad dressing.

Some stains will not dissolve in either water or cleaning fluid until they have been chemically changed. Dried blood, dried paint, and egg stains that have dried are examples of this. It's better to let your drycleaner handle these types of stains.

Stain Removal Instructions

Now that you've had a primer in stain removal, you're ready to roll up your sleeves and tackle the stains of summer. So

bring on those ketchup, mustard, and barbecue sauce stains, but be sure to remember these five rules while you're at it.

Rule No. 1: Always test for colorfastness before applying any stain removal agent. Blot a small amount of the agent on an inconspicuous area of the garment with a white cloth. If any traces of dye appear on the cloth, do not use that agent. It is not safe to use on the garment.

Rule No. 2: The longer a stain remains in the fabric, the harder it will be to remove, so act quickly.

Rule No. 3: Blot stains — never rub or brush the stained area, as this may damage the fabric. Work from the outside edge of the stain toward

its center so that a ring will not form around the stained area.

Rule No. 4: Do not use more chemicals than you need.

Rule No. 5: Place absorbent materials such as white towels or white paper towels under the stained area to absorb the stain and prevent it from spreading. Change the position of the absorbent material to provide a clean area beneath the stain as necessary.

Common Procedures

The following are four methods that may help remove a stain and a list of stain removal agents. Look up the type of stain on the list, then follow the recommended method to remove it. When you use this guide, complete one step at a time. If the stain appears to be removed after only one or two steps, stop. Remember, if you are in doubt, take your stained garment to your drycleaner.

Materials Needed

- Drycleaning fluid — look for products that contain petroleum solvent, petroleum hydrocarbon or petroleum distillate. Remember to follow the manufacturer's instructions for use, work in a well-ventilated area, and never put garments with drycleaning fluid on them in the washer or dryer.
- Mild synthetic washing detergent — 1 tablespoon per cup of warm water

- Household ammonia — 1 teaspoon per cup of water
- White vinegar — 1 part vinegar to 3 parts of water
- Bleach — 3 percent hydrogen peroxide
- Bleach — chlorine bleach (sodium hypochlorite) — 1 part chlorine bleach, 4 parts water — never use on silk, wool, nylon or spandex
- Enzyme detergent — common household detergent with enzymes added or presoak.

Stain Removal Methods

- 1. Blood, chocolate, egg, ice cream, milk, baby formula, vomit, perspiration** — Blot with water. Then use an enzyme detergent. If the stain is still there use ammonia. If the stain remains use hydrogen peroxide.
- 2. Coffee, tea, mustard, wine, soft drinks, tomato sauce, soy sauce** — Blot with water. Then use mild synthetic detergent. If the stain remains use vinegar. If the stain still remains use hydrogen peroxide.
- 3. Butter, furniture polish, grease, lipstick, foundation makeup, mayonnaise** — Blot with drycleaning solvent. If the stain is still visible use mild synthetic detergent. Finally, try ammonia.
- 4. Candle wax, crayon, chewing gum, paint** — Blot with solvent. If any staining material remains treat area with mild synthetic detergent and ammonia. The last traces of color matter may be removed with a bleach.

Additional Tips

The following stains are also common but require a special procedure for removal.

- **Ballpoint pen:** Apply drycleaning solvent. Blot until all bleeding stops, moving the stained area as the towels absorb the ink. If the stain remains treat it with a mild synthetic detergent and household ammonia.
- **Mildew:** Usually requires washing with chlorine bleach. Be sure to test for colorfastness before using even on white garments. Never use bleach on silk, wool, nylon or spandex.
- **Nail polish:** Never use this method on acetate fibers and be sure to test for colorfastness before proceeding. Blot the stain with acetone, moving the stained area as the towel absorbs the nail polish. □



Depending on the type, stains require either dry-side or wet-side stain removal treatment, or a combination of the two.

Six More Things to Keep in Mind About Home Stain Removal

BLEACHING: Bleaching is a last resort if the stain does not respond to either dry-side or wet-side measures. Ordinary 3 percent hydrogen peroxide bleach, available at grocery and drug stores, is the easiest to use. But test the bleach first on an unexposed seam or a sample of the material. Pour some bleach on the sample piece of fabric. Wait five minutes for a reaction. Many white fabrics contain an optical brightener that will turn yellow when bleached. Very bright-colored fabrics may contain optical brightening agents as well; a bleach may cause these colors to become dull.

RUST STAINS: Rust stains should be approached with great care. Rust removers are sold at grocery stores. Use them only on washable garments or fabrics so they can be laundered immediately afterward. Laundering will rinse out the rust remover. If it is not removed, it can burn the skin. Do not use a rust remover on any fabric containing metallic threads.

TOUGH STAINS: Some stains don't lend themselves to home methods. Most medicine stains, fingernail polish, adhesives, and paint are difficult to remove and should be taken to a professional cleaner.

DON'T WAIT: All stains should be removed before they have time to set. Time or heat can set stains. Even a professional cleaner will have trouble getting the stain out if he or she doesn't receive the garment soon after the stain occurred.

DELICATE FABRICS: Do not attempt home stain removal on leather, suede, furs, vinyl, fabrics that are heavily sized like taffeta and organdy, nets, satins, and those with fugitive colors.

INVISIBLE STAINS: Many fruit juices and drinks disappear into the fabric and leave no visible stain, though the sugars are deposited there. Drycleaning fluid doesn't dissolve them. Heat browns them causing a stain that doesn't come out. If you spill juice or soda on a fabric, flush it out immediately with water — even though the stain is invisible.

For more specific advice, consult your professional drycleaner. □

Everyone has been taught a home stain removal remedy or two by their mother or grandmother. In the case of many of these quick-fix solutions, there is a grain of truth to them, but overall, either the proposed method may do more damage than good, or there simply may be a better way. To debunk some of these old wives' tales, the *Clothes Care Gazette* separates the facts from the fiction.

Myth: In a pinch, apply club soda to a stain. It is a great first aid remedy.

Reality: In some instances club soda will remove a clear colorless water-based stain, but so will good old-fashioned, cool water. While club soda may be effective in removing

Heavier scorch needs bleach to remove the stain. Since there has probably been some fabric damage if the scorch is severe, it would be best to try 3 percent hydrogen peroxide instead of a chlorine bleach. If the damage has gone beyond scorching and has burned the fabric, it has been permanently damaged.

Myth: Applying saliva will help remove milk stains, blood stains, and other types of food stains from clothes.

Reality: Although unpalatable, saliva contains enzymes that help break up some stains through a digestive process — just as the saliva in your mouth begins to digest the foods you

Home Stain Removal Remedies: Fact vs. Fiction

water-based stains such as red wine or ketchup, it will not remove greasy, oily stains such as mayonnaise, butter or gravy because it does not possess grease-dissolving properties. Furthermore, applying club soda to an oil-based stain could create a more complex problem and diminish the chance of full stain removal.

When applying club soda to a water-based stain, both the club soda and the stain must be flushed out completely right away. Otherwise a residue surrounded by a water ring will remain that could result in a permanent stain when dry.

Myth: To remove a scorch mark from an iron, rub the scorched area with a piece of raw onion for a short time, soak it in cold water, and the scorch will fade.

Reality: Rubbing an onion on a scorch mark does not remove the stain. Light scorch will sometimes rinse out with just cold water.

eat. For obvious sanitary reasons, however, there are more preferred methods of stain removal, such as an enzyme presoak, which can be purchased at grocery stores, or the digesters used by drycleaners.

Myth: For ink stains from a ballpoint pen, apply hair spray and water.

Reality: Hairspray and water can indeed remove ballpoint ink, but you may be trading one problem for another. That's because hairspray could contain alcohol and oils such as resins and lanolin. The alcohol in the hairspray can cause color damage, especially on silk; likewise, oils and other ingredients could lead to additional stains. A more appropriate solution would be to apply drycleaning solvent to the stain (there are many over-the-counter solvent-based products that consumers can purchase). Blot the stain until all the bleeding stops, moving the stained area as the towel absorbs the ink. If the stain remains treat it with a mild synthetic detergent and household ammonia. □

STAIN REMOVAL ON THE WEB

If you want more information about home stain removal the Internet can be a useful place to turn, assuming you are getting good advice. Much of what you see online is unfiltered, so it's up to you to decide whether you're getting good or bad information. Two informative Web sites are www.fabriclink.com/holi-

[daystain.html](http://www.fabriclink.com/holi-daystain.html) and www.doityourself.com/clean. They offer stain removal tips on everything from motor oil to mascara to salsa.

If you are unsure about a stain removal procedure that you read about online, refer back to the Five Rules of Home Stain Removal. If you're still in doubt, consult your drycleaner. □

GAZETTE FORUM

Everyday IFI receives numerous calls requesting help on how to handle various problems. This column addresses common questions that are received on garment care issues.

Q A white sweater I left outside to dry turned yellow on the side facing the sun. What happened?

A Many of today's bright white linens and garments have been treated with optical brighteners. These are usually fluorescent dyes. Sunlight, chlorine bleach, and other whitening agents break the brighteners down and can make them turn yellow. In this instance, the side of the sweater facing the sun has yellowed.

With new fabrics and dyes out today, it is important to carefully follow a garment's care instructions. Dry a white garment in the shade or indoors to prevent discoloration or damage to an optical brightener. □



Color Me Bad The sun turned this white sweater yellow. At right, you can see what color the sweater is supposed to look like when the sleeve across the chest is unfolded.

Q I have a garment with a care label that says, "French Clean Only." What does this mean?

A The term French cleaning dates back to the 19th century. The firm Jolly-Belin in Paris, France, opened a drycleaning plant in 1845 and is credited with spearheading the first successful use of an organic solvent for commercial drycleaning. This new technology quickly spread to other countries. In English-speaking countries the process became known as "French Cleaning," due to the earlier fame gained in France.

The term, although seldom used today, carries with it a connotation of highly skilled handiwork. Although the process is basically the same as any drycleaning process, it implies that special attention and care must be given to a garment. Hand finishing may be required.

Some garment manufacturers are using the term "French Clean Only" to suggest that the garment be hand cleaned in a solvent. This instruction does not meet the requirements of the Care Label Rule, nor is it practical, since this process would not produce a clean garment. The term may also imply that the garment can only be spot cleaned because no immersion methods are acceptable.

Your cleaner should test the garment for colorfastness before cleaning to determine whether solvent or water will damage it. Often there is no safe way to care for garments with these instructions without causing damage. □

Q How do you remove chewing gum?

A Chewing gum can be removed from many garments simply by drycleaning the item. Chewing gum is soluble in drycleaning solvent, and little or no pretreatment is required. However, if the item is machine washable, drycleaning may not be the best option.

Chewing gum can usually be removed by blotting the stain with an ice cube. This hardens the gum and makes it stiff and brittle for easy removal. Once the gum has hardened, gently lift it from the fabric. This procedure may cause some of the surface fibers to pull or snag but usually not enough to create noticeable damage.

If any gum remains, sponge it with a solvent-based stain remover, which is available at most grocery stores. Before using these products, test for colorfastness by applying the product in an unexposed area. Let it set for five minutes. If the solvent affects the color, do not use the product. If the color remains intact, proceed with the stain removal.

Place the stained area face down over several layers of white paper towels. Apply a small amount of the fluid to the stain. Using another paper towel, blot the stain from the reverse side of the fabric and lift off the remainder of the gum. Continue to apply the stain remover and blot until the gum is removed. Once the gum is off, thoroughly rinse out the stain removal agent, allow the garment to dry, and launder it in the hottest water that is safe for the garment. □