# Sleeping Bag Care

Protect your sleeping-bag investment. With a bit of REI's care and cleaning know-how, you can keep your bag in top condition for many camping or backpacking seasons to come.

**On the Trail**

Keep your sleeping bag clean and dry. Accumulated body oils, sweat and dirt can rob your sleeping bag of its insulating power. Tips:

* **Sleep in clean clothes.** Best is long underwear, socks and a hat. If it's warm out, wear clean cotton clothes to bed. Just don't fall into bed in the same clothes you hiked in. You'll drag dirt into the bag with you, and you're likely to sleep colder because of accumulated perspiration.
* Avoiding sleeping in the clothes you cooked and ate in—especially if you're in bear country.
* Consider using a **sleeping bag liner**. Liners weigh little and keep your bag clean. Plus, they add about 5° F to 15° F to your bag's temperature rating. At the end of each trip, wash the liner and you're good to go again.
* **Air out your sleeping bag** **daily**. Even if you have to wait till midday to do so, turn it inside-out to dry out any moisture. Don't leave a bag in direct sunlight for very long, as UV light slowly degrades the fabric. But if your bag gets really wet, it may be necessary to air it out for several hours.

Tips for using a **stuff sack**:

* Use a larger stuff sack to make stuffing easier. You can still pack around the stuff sack inside your backpack.
* Compression stuff sacks save space in your pack; just avoid compressing your bag for an extended period as it will reduce the bag's loft.
* For easier stuffing, start with the foot first and the zipper at least partially closed. Push the bag firmly into the bottom of the stuff sack and stuff evenly as you go up. This also puts even stress on the stitching.
* Wet weather? Line a nylon stuff sack with a plastic garbage bag and then stuff the sleeping bag in it. Or use a waterproof stuff sack.

**Between Trips**

**Spot Cleaning**

Any time you wash a sleeping bag, you subject it to wear and tear and decrease the loft a little. Spot cleaning the shell with a paste of laundry detergent, water and a toothbrush is advised before washing the whole thing.

Focus on the hood and collar where hair and skin oils tend to accumulate. By holding the shell or liner fabric away from the insulation, you can wash and rinse the area without getting the inside wet.

**Washing**

If your bag is losing loft, is darkened with grime and basically no longer inhabitable, then by all means give it a full washing.

Many people prefer to have their bag professionally laundered. REI partners with Rainy Pass Repairs, inc., to offer a [bag-laundering service](http://www.rei.com/stores/repairs/repair-services.html).

Tip: Dry cleaning is not appropriate for sleeping bags, especially down. Solvents used in dry cleaning can strip the natural oils from down that help it retain loft. Solvents are also very difficult to remove from synthetic insulation.

If you decide to wash your bag yourself, use a gentle, non-detergent soap such as Nikwax Down Wash 2.0, which is made for washing down- and synthetic-filled items.

* Down: For down bags, hand-washing in a bathtub works best. Fill the tub with warm water and add one of the above-recommended cleaners. Put the bag in and gently work in the soap, then allow it to soak for 15 minutes. Drain the tub and press out any remaining water. In a cold-water rinse, work the soap out gently, let the bag sit for 15 minutes and drain. Press out any remaining water. Repeat the rinse until all the soap is out. It's also possible, (according to some bag manufacturers) to machine wash a down bag, as long as a front-loading washer is used. Never use an agitator-style machine as the motion can damage the stitching and insulation. Make sure to wash on the gentle cycle in cool water with one of the aforementioned down soaps.
* Synthetics: Synthetic bags can be washed in the same way. Hand-wash in a bathtub, or use a large, front-loading washer with no agitator. Use cool water and mild soap. Rinse several times to make sure all the soap is removed. An extra spin cycle or an extractor may be used to remove excess water.

**Drying**

Air drying is the safest way to dry your bag, but obviously the longest. If you tumble dry your bag, use very low heat or a no-heat setting and keep an eye on it. Dryers have varying heat outputs, so you need to check periodically to make sure the shell and insulation aren't overheating, which can actually lead to melting. Add a couple of clean tennis balls when the bag is nearly dry. This will help break up any clumps of insulation and help restore the loft.

**Storage**

How you store your bag between trips affects its lifespan. When you arrive home from a trip, first air out the bag inside-out for a couple days to make sure it's dry. Then store in a large cotton storage sack—often included when you purchase a sleeping bag, but also available separately (note: REI Storage Bag is shown above).

Do **not** store your bag compressed in its stuff sack as this will eventually damage the fill. Watertight storage bags are also a bad idea. Condensation can build up inside them and result in mildew. In short, allow your bag come to its full loft with plenty of cool, dry ventilation.

**Other Sleeping Bag Tips**

**Restoring DWR**

The original DWR (durable water repellent) finish on a sleeping bag's shell eventually wears off. You can restore water repellency and help keep the bag cleaner if you reapply this finish. There are several products available to restore the DWR to your sleeping bag shell fabric.

**Leaking Down**

Many, but not all, goose-down bags feature "down-proof" liners and shells made of very tightly woven fabric which prevent the down from getting through. If a few feathers escape through the shell or liner of your bag, don't become too concerned. This is normal, especially along the seams. The sharp quills of the feathers may poke through, especially when the bag is new and the down hasn't totally settled. Work the feathers gently back inside, pulling from the opposite side; the holes should be minimal and close back up.

**Fabric Tears**

For small holes or tears in the sleeping bag shell, a patch of nylon repair tape will do the trick until you get home.