

How to Care For Your Sleeping Bag

Care

Want to extend the useable life of your sleeping bag? The following are a few tips to help you:

- Don't pack your bag wet. If your bag does get wet hang it out to air dry or fluff dry it in a dryer *without heat*.
- Hang your bag out after each trip and allow it to air out. Washing your bag after each trip is not necessary (unless each trip is one month in the backcountry). When your bag needs a bath follow the directions provided by the manufacturer. Washing your bag in a large laundry mat style machine is better than using your home machine. A machine without an agitator is best (front loading) so drawstrings and straps don't get wrapped around the machine in the washing process or worse, torn off. (See the section below on cleaning.)
- When hiking or going into the backcountry, store your bag in a waterproofed compression sack. Trust us, you will be glad you did. The bag will stay dry, even if you take a dump into a river by accident when traveling the backcountry. Having a dry bag and the ability to make a fire can greatly aid you in the event weather conditions sour. Also, the compression sack will reduce the amount of space your sleeping bag takes up in your pack by as much as fifty percent.
- Remember the best secret weapon when in the outdoors, duct tape. Your six to twelve feet of emergency duct tape can be used to patch a tear or seal up a broken zipper.
- Don't be lazy with your zippers. If your bag has two zippers that meet at a middle point don't use one end to go all the way around the bag. This puts a lot of strain on the zipper and increases the chances of a zipper jumping off of its teeth and jamming. Try to have those zippers meeting at a near halfway point to balance the load and the distance the zipper has to travel.
- Always stuff your sleeping bag, never roll it.
- Be gentle with your sleeping bag when removing it from the stuff sack, never yank it.
- Store your bag uncompressed in a large, breathable storage sack or king-sized pillowcase. Hanging it or storing it flat also works.
- Accumulated body oils, sweat and dirt can rob your sleeping bag of its insulating power. Keep them away from your bag by sleeping in clean, 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 in the clothes (even if they feel dry). And never sleep in the clothes you cooked or ate in. This is extremely important in bear country!
- Never lay your bag directly on the dirt; use a ground cloth.
- Don't store your bag rolled up tightly in a compression sack. Bags stored for a long time that are compressed tightly can lose their loft. Stuffing is actually easier on the fabric and fill. Store your bag rolled up loosely and in a breathable sack made of canvas.
- Air and fluff your bag after each use and never leave it compressed for long periods. Take your bag out every three to six months and fluff it up to help maintain its loft.

Cleaning

Every sleeping bag, down or synthetic, must be cleaned. Accumulated body oils, trail dust and grime all serve to decrease the effectiveness of a bag's insulation, and increase obnoxious odors

and fiber-weakening microbes. Note: 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.

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.