

Laundry without ruining clothes

Easy · 10 min of work per load · \$

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ Laundry detergent
- ☐ A stain remover, or liquid detergent for pretreating
- ☐ Color-safe (oxygen) bleach, optional
- ☐ Quarters or a laundry card, if you use a shared machine
- ☐ A mesh bag for delicates, optional

WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 Read the care label.** The FTC's Care Labeling Rule requires manufacturers to attach care instructions to clothes. The label has to say whether to wash by hand or machine, give a water temperature if regular hot water would cause harm, and say "No bleach" if every bleach would harm it.
- 2 Sort by color.** Wash whites separately, pastels and medium colors together, and brights and darks by themselves. White and light-colored synthetics pick up dark dyes easily.
- 3 Sort by dirt and fabric.** Keep heavily dirty items away from lightly dirty ones, or whites slowly turn gray. Wash delicates and loose knits on the gentle cycle. Wash lint shedders like new towels and fuzzy sweatshirts apart from things that attract lint.
- 4 Treat stains first.** Apply a stain remover or liquid detergent, testing it on a seam first. Blot a stain, don't rub it, because rubbing spreads it and can damage fabric. When in doubt, rinse or soak in cold water first.
- 5 Use the right amount of detergent.** Too much or too little can leave clothes less clean. Most detergents are concentrated now, so use the cap or scoop that comes with them.
- 6 Pick the cycle.** Normal for everyday cottons, towels and sheets. Delicate or gentle for fragile fabrics. Heavy duty for jeans and bedding. Quick wash for small, lightly dirty loads.
- 7 Before drying, check for stains that didn't wash out.** Treat them and wash again instead of drying, because drying can set a stain permanently. Use low heat for heat-sensitive fabrics to help prevent shrinking.
- 8 Clean the lint filter before or after every load, and don't overload the dryer.**

Watch out Dryers start house fires, and the leading cause of home dryer fires is failure to clean them. Never run one without its lint filter, and turn it off if you leave home or go to bed. Lint also builds up behind the dryer, so clean back there too.

DAD NOTE Check before it goes in the dryer. The washer forgives. The dryer doesn't.

Full lesson: aptkeys.com/your-place/cleaning-and-laundry/laundry-without-ruining-clothes/

Checked October 2, 2026. Sources: American Cleaning Institute; Federal Trade Commission; National Fire Protection Association; U.S. Fire Administration (FEMA).