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Ineffectiveness of Home Remedy Dye Setting Treatments

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Color loss or change during the care and the laundering of clothing often causes consumer complaints. The bright, fashionable colors found in today's clothing often fall victim to these problems.

Dyes can bleed in drycleaning solvent or in water and cause the original color to fade and stain other colors. Garments trimmed in bright red or navy blue on white are beautiful when new, but after the first washing the color may bleed onto the white.

Excess dye remaining on the surface of the fabric can cause dye transfer either in water or solvent bath or by crocking or rubbing. Some fabrics are dyed with too much dye, especially those with deep, intense colors such as reds, blues, and greens. Various publications have provided "home remedies" for setting dyes in fabrics. Some recommend using vinegar and water; salt, alum and water; vinegar, salt, alum and water or Epsom salts and water. Some of these remedies are old dyeing procedures that have been passed on from generation to generation.

Since no information was found about the effectiveness of home treatments for dye setting, research was conducted at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Dr. Patricia Crews investigated various home remedy treatments for setting dyes. Red dyes applied to cotton cloth were used because of their perceived problems with bleeding during laundering. Blue dyes were also included for comparison purposes.

After treatment and laundering of the treated samples color and staining evaluations determined the effects of the treatments on color change and bleeding.

Results

The results of the consumer dye setting treatments in reducing color loss and staining in cotton fabrics were ineffective. None of the treatments substantially reduced color loss. Some treatments actually increased the amount of color loss in the fabric after laundering.

The dye setting treatments often recommended by family and friends waste consumer's time, energy and

money.

What Can Be Done

When buying a garment, note the color of the item and the information given on hang tags and labels, particularly the care label.

Look at the garment label. Is it colorfast? What care is recommended? If the label say to "wash dark colors separately" you could expect the dye will bleed in washing.

The garment should be washed or drycleaned according to the care instructions given. If the garment is suspected of having excess dye, wash or dryclean the item separately. Highly fugitive dyes have been known to contaminate whole wash or drycleaning loads.

If dye transfer occurs even when recommended care procedures are used, return the garment to the store where it was purchased.

If excess dye is the main cause of bleeding and dye transfer it may stop after a number of cleanings or washings.

Since color change or loss may not be noticed at first, all pieces of a two- or three-piece outfit should be washed or cleaned at each cleaning.

Restoration should be followed by quick removal of excess water or solvent and fast drying. The fabrics should not remain wet any longer than necessary.

If color has crocked or rubbed off, the garment should be washed or drycleaned according to the care label to remove any loose dye from the remaining fabric. Generally, the dye that rubs or crocks off during use is best removed by detergent and water solutions. An oxidizing bleach such as chlorine is sometimes effective, but chlorine bleach is not safe for all fabrics. Try a weaker bleach such as an oxygen bleach (sodium perborate bleaches) that is safe for all fabrics and washable colors.

Some Reasons for Color Loss

- Some dyes bleed in drycleaning.
- Some dyes bleed in laundering.
- If dyes bleed when exposed to moisture, they are also susceptible to rain, spilled water or drinks, and perspiration.
- Most dye will eventually fade on exposure to light, especially sunlight.
- Some common household substances such as the acid in lemon juice can bleach some dyes.
- Benzoyl peroxide, an ingredient in some acne medications and skin cleansers, can cause color loss or color change.
- During storage, acid gases in the atmosphere can react with some dyes.

Reference

Crews, Patricia Cox. Effectiveness of Dye Setting Treatments on Cotton Fabrics Dyed with Direct, Reactive, and Vat Dyes. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 7(4) Summer 1989, 1-7.

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