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EC73-488 Removing Stains from Washable Fabrics

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Removing Stains from Washable Fabrics

Jane Speece, Extension Specialist (Clothing)

Successful stain removal starts with the selection of a method suited to the stain, the fabric and the finish. Identify the stain if possible. If you are not sure what caused the stain, it will help if you can tell if it is a greasy stain, a non-greasy stain or a combination of the two.

GENERAL RULES FOR REMOVING STAINS

Greasy and Oily Stains

Rub soap or detergent into the stain and rinse with warm water. Launder as usual. If stain persists, soak overnight in detergent solution. Stubborn grease may require a spot remover. Launder as usual. If a slight color stain remains, a bleach may be used.

Non-Greasy Stains

Sponge stain with cool water. Some stains may require soaking for several hours. If stain persists, work soap or detergent into it. Rinse. Launder as usual. If color stain remains, a bleach may be used.

Combination Greasy and Non-Greasy

Sponge or soak in cool water. Rub liquid soap or detergent into it and rinse. If greasy stain remains, use a spot remover. Launder as usual. If any stain persists, a bleach may be used.

Working With a Stain Remover

Place stain face down on a soft white cloth or paper toweling. Apply the stain remover on the underside so that the stain will be

washed from the surface of the fabric rather than through the fabric. Dampen a cotton pad or soft cloth with the spot remover and sponge the back of the stain.

Work from the center of the stain with light brushing motions. Sponge the stain irregularly around the edges so that there will be less chance of a line when the fabric dries. Replace the undercloth and sponging cloth as they become stained. Do not let the remover dry on the fabric. Rinse or launder to flush the stain remover from the garment.

Choose non-flammable spot removers. Use carefully in a well-ventilated area.

BLEACHES

Bleaches are an aid in removing many spots and stains. Suit the bleach to the fabric. When not sure of the fabric or finish, use the milder oxygen bleach first for stain removal.

Chlorine Bleaches are strong bleaches and can cause fabric damage if not used properly. Chlorine bleaches should not be used on silk, wool, spandex or some resin-treated fabrics. They should be used with care on all other fibers and with colored fabrics. Follow package directions when treating stains.

Oxygen Bleaches are considered safe for all fabrics, fibers and finishes. Though bleach action is mild, they are most effective in hot water. Care should be taken to use water only as hot as is safe for the fiber and fabric.

Color Removers can be used on white fabrics of various fiber contents and finishes. They should not be used on dyed fabrics as they will remove or change the color of the dye.

Removing Stains from Washable Fabrics

PRETREAT SOIL

Check shirt collars, cuffs, minor spots on garments and treat before washing. Detergents and hot water may set spots and stains permanently.

Use your regular detergent made into a paste or a liquid detergent to pretreat spots and stains. Work this into the stained area with your thumbs or a small hand brush. Use the same detergent for laundering as for pretreatment.

Commercial products for pretreating stains are often effective. *Use according to manufacturer's directions.*

REMOVING SPOTS AND STAINS

Identify the stain.

Treat promptly.

Test in an inconspicuous area if not sure of color change or fabric damage.

Use stain removal compounds according to manufacturer's directions.

Avoid hot water if unsure of what the stain is.

Work carefully with light brushing motions. Rinse well. Dry quickly. Launder garment in usual manner.

Repeat treatment, followed by a bleach, if necessary. *Note:* Chlorine bleach should not be used on wool, silk, spandex or resin-treated fabrics unless the label states that it is all right. Household ammonia should be used with caution for silk and wool. Enzyme products should be dissolved completely before soaking clothes in them.

Adhesive Tape

Scrape gummy matter from stain with a dull knife. Sponge with spot remover. Rinse.

Beverages (soft drinks, alcohol, wine)

Sponge with cool water or soak in cool water for at least 30 minutes. Rub in liquid detergent if spot persists. Rinse in cool water.

Blood

Soak in cool water for 30 minutes or longer. Work detergent into the stain. Rinse with cool water. If stain is stubborn, place a few drops of household ammonia on it and repeat detergent treatment. Rinse. An alternate method is to soak the stain in an enzyme solution.

Food Fats

Rub liquid detergent into the stain. Let stand for a few minutes. Rinse. If stain persists, soak overnight in detergent.

Fruits and Berries

Sponge with cool water or soak stain at least 30 minutes. Work a detergent into the spot. Rinse. For old stains or persistent stains, rub glycerine into the stain and let stand for an hour or so, then apply a few drops of white vinegar. Rinse in cool water.

Citrus Fruits: Rinse or sponge with cool water. Neutralize acid by applying a paste of baking soda and water or sponge with diluted ammonia (½ water). Rinse with cool water.

Grass

Rub with concentrated detergent and let stand a few minutes. Rinse with lukewarm water. If safe for fabric dye, sponge stain with rubbing alcohol. An alternate method is to soak the stain in an enzyme solution.

Gravy

Sponge or soak in cool water. Work liquid detergent into the stain. Rinse. If greasy stain remains, sponge with spot remover. An alternate method is to soak the spot in an enzyme solution.

Greases, Oils

Rub detergent into the stain. Rinse with warm water. Soak overnight in detergent if stain persists. Rinse. Apply spot remover for persistent stain.

Ink, Ballpoint

Saturate spot with cool water. Sponge stain repeatedly with rubbing alcohol. Dilute alcohol (2/3 cup water, 1/3 cup alcohol) for modacrylics, acetates, and triacetates. Some may require a fabric color remover. Washing may set some stains. Test on a like scrap before washing.

Mayonnaise, Salad Dressing

Soak in cool water for at least 30 minutes. Rub detergent into the spot. Rinse. If greasy stain remains, use a spot remover.

Mildew

Moisten with lemon juice and salt. Set in sun to dry. Launder. If stain remains, treat with a bleach suitable to finish and fabric.

Mud

Scrape off wax with a dull knife. Place stained area between several layers of facial tissues or paper towels. Press with a warm iron. Sponge any remaining stain with a spot remover. Rinse.

Catsup

Soak in cool water for at least 30 minutes. Work a detergent into the stain. Rinse.

Chewing Gum

Harden gum by rubbing with ice. Scrape off with a dull knife. Sponge any remaining stain with spot remover. Rinse.

Chocolate, Cocoa

Sponge with cool water or soak in cool water at least 30 minutes. Work detergent into the stain. Rinse with cool water. If stain remains, sponge with a spot remover. An alternate method is to soak the stain in an enzyme solution.

Coffee, Tea

Soak in cool water for at least 30 minutes. If stain remains, work liquid detergent into it. Rinse.

With Cream: Follow above procedures, then use a spot remover or soak in an enzyme solution.

Cosmetics (lipstick, eyeshadow, mascara, etc.)

Work detergent into the stain. Rinse well. If greasy stain remains, sponge with a spot remover. Repeated treatments may be necessary.

Crayons

Work liquid detergent into stain. Rinse well. Repeat if necessary. Sponge with dry cleaning solvent if greasy stain remains.

Cream, Milk, Ice Cream

Sponge or soak in cool water for at least 30 minutes. Work detergent into the stain. Rinse. An alternate method is to soak the stain in an enzyme solution.

Deodorants

Sponge with detergent and warm water. Rinse. Sponge with diluted ammonia (½ water) to neutralize acids and to help restore color. Rinse. Bleach according to fiber and fabric. Some deodorants may be removed by sponging the area with diluted white vinegar (½ water). Rinse. Then sponge with rubbing alcohol. Rinse. Test to be sure the fabric dye will not fade.

Eggs

Soak in cool water at least 30 minutes. Work detergent into the stain. Rinse. An alternate method is to soak in an enzyme solution.

Let stain dry. Brush well. Soak in cool water. Work a detergent into it. Rinse. If safe for dye, use rubbing alcohol. Dilute for acetate and triacetate. If stain remains, use a bleach suitable for finish and fabric.

Mustard

Work liquid detergent into the stain. Rinse. Overnight soaking in a detergent solution may be needed. Several treatments may be needed.

Perspiration

Fresh: Sponge or rinse with cool water. Then neutralize acid by applying a paste of baking soda and water or add diluted ammonia (½ water) to both sides of fabric. Rinse with cool water.

Old: Rinse or sponge with cool water. Neutralize alkali by applying diluted white vinegar (½ water) or lemon juice. Rinse with cool water.

Rust

Sprinkle with salt, then moisten with lemon juice. Spread in the sun to dry. Rinse. Repeat treatment if necessary. Do not use a chlorine bleach on rust stains. Commercial rust removers are available. Follow manufacturer's directions.

Scorch

Work a detergent into the stain. Rinse well. If stain remains, use a bleach. Severe scorch damages the fabric and cannot be removed.

Tar

Sponge spot remover on stain. Rinse. Repeat if needed. If a yellow stain persists, use a bleach. An alternate method is to work in detergent or pour a household degreaser through the stain and leave overnight. Launder.

Urine

Soak in cool water at least 30 minutes. Work in detergent. Rinse. If fabric color has changed, sponge stain with ammonia water, then white vinegar water.

Vomit

Soak in cool water. Rub in detergent. Rinse. Sponge any remaining greasy stains with a spot remover. An alternate method is to soak the stain in an enzyme solution.

Yellowing

Chlorine (Yellowed clothes with resin finish): White or colorfast fabrics: Rinse in water, then use a color remover according to package directions.

Storage or aging (non-resin finishes): Wash in as hot water with as strong a bleach solution as the fabric can stand. Lay in direct sunlight to dry. An alternate method is to use a fabric color remover.



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