

How to Wash a Sleeping Bag

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Just like any bedding, you want your sleeping bag to be clean and fresh. Sleeping bags, which may have down or a synthetic-fiber fill, have specific ways of keeping them clean and in good condition.

Steps:

1. Follow the instructions on the sleeping bag or the tag that came with the sleeping bag. The manufacturer knows best about what works for the particular bag.
2. Clean stains and spills off with a sponge when they occur. Pre-treat stains on synthetic-fill sleeping bags before washing.
3. Wash either a down or synthetic fiber sleeping bag by hand or in a large washing machine. Hand-washing is tough because it takes a lot of rinsing to get the soap out.
4. Use a front-loading washer or a commercial washing machine. A sleeping bag can be hard on the machine and vice versa because the machine agitates roughly with a large bulky item.
5. Zip the bag before washing.
6. Wash a down bag in warm water with a mild soap like Woolite or Ivory Snow, not detergent. Do not add bleach or fabric softener. Synthetic-fill bags may be washed with regular laundry detergent, and fabric softener may be used.
7. Process the bag through another wash cycle - without soap - to completely rinse it. Soap residues can cause clumping of the insulation and loss of loft.
8. Handle the bag carefully when wet. Press - don't wring - the water out. Wrap it up in a ball and transfer it to the dryer.
9. Clean a down-filled sleeping bag occasionally to keep it fresh but also to maintain the loft (fluffiness) of the down. Do not dry-clean down bags unless the manufacturer insists on it, as the cleaning solvents can strip the feathers of natural oils.
10. Dry a down bag on very low heat with a clean, rubber-soled athletic shoe or a tennis ball. This fluffs the down and breaks up clumps in the batting. Thoroughly dry the bag before storing, though this may take some time.
11. Dry a synthetic-fill bag on low heat, but it can also be dried outside. Lay it flat to dry.

Tips:

- Always use a ground cloth and sleeping bag liner when camping.
- Sleeping bags don't hold up well if over washed. Only Polargard filled bags can be washed a lot. Store the bag properly. If you stuff it into its sack, the sustained compression of the insulation (down or synthetic) will cause the bag to lose its loft. It's better to hang the bag in a closet or in an extra-large storage sack that permits it to be loose and uncompressed.
- Air a down-filled sleeping bag out for at least a week before using it if it has been dry-cleaned. Dry-cleaning solvents are toxic.
- Air any bag in the sun for a few hours to remove odors before use.
- Put the sleeping bag away for the season with some baking soda sprinkled inside. It will absorb odors and then just brush the baking soda out before you use it again.
- Place a large plastic bag in the bottom of the sleeping bag compartment of your pack. If you expect rain, you can wrap your stuffed sleeping bag in the plastic for extra protection.
- Check inside the bag for items before washing.
- When washing a down-filled sleeping bag never use a top-loading, agitator-type machine. The batts of synthetic insulation and fragile baffles that hold the down in place will be stressed, and the bag could be ruined.