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Proper Garment Care

Buying high quality garments, with the assumption that they're built to last, only means something if you know how to take proper care of your clothes. Stuffing them into overcrowded closets or sending them off to bad dry cleaners will shorten their life considerably. Fortunately, taking care of your clothes doesn't require much work. You can accomplish it with just a few minutes a day.

For suits and sport coats, dry cleaning twice a year should be sufficient for anything that's only worn once or twice a week. Sending it in more often than that will shorten the life and ruin the look of a jacket. That's because most dry cleaners use harsh chemicals and give hard pressings. You can, of course, use a highquality cleaner that doesn't employ such methods, but those will cost you more money.

For every day care, brush the dirt out with a soft bristled garment brush. This will prevent them from getting deep into the fabric, where friction can damage the fibers. It'll also knock out any food bits that may attract moths. You can buy garment brushes from Kent, though sometimes slightly imperfect ones can be had for a bit cheaper on eBay. For something truly nice, Linkson Jack has some brushes backed with oxhorn.

To begin brushing, wipe down any large, unfinished wooden table, and lay your garment down on the surface. A polished table may be too slippery, so if you only have one of those, put your garment on a blanket or strip of felt so it won't slide about. If this doesn't work, you can also brush your garment while it's on a hanger (though I find it's harder to really bring some pressure to bear on the brush this way). While brushing, use short flicks of the wrist and always brush in the same direction. *Never, ever scrub.* You can first brush against the nap to remove any dirt, and then down the nap for a smooth finish. Some people even recommend dampening the brush with some water first for a bit of a freshening up, though I've never found the need to do this.

For wrinkles, you can let your jackets hang for a day or two. Heavy wools and linens should naturally relax over time. If you still need to sharpen them up, try using a garment steamer, but be careful to stay away from the seams and don't go too wild with the device. Otherwise, you can ruin the stitching and take out the shape. Afterwards, hang your jacket on a hanger with flared shoulders. The Hanger Project makes the nicest ones I know of. The width and curvature of their shoulders most closely imitate a man's natural shoulders, which is what you want. If you can't afford them, however, Wooden Hanger USA sells some very nice options starting at \$7.

If your jackets are finely constructed, you may also want to send them in for a hand press once a year or so. This will help restore their shape, which is often what gives a suit its flattering silhouette. Note, a hand press is different from a machine press. Most places will offer the second, even if they advertise it as the first. Machine presses take shape out; hand presses put shape in. If you can't find someone in your area who can give you this service, you can send your jackets to [RAVE FabriCARE](#).

For trousers, I recommend a similar treatment. Wools and linens go to the dry cleaner, though perhaps a bit more frequently than jackets since they tend to get dirty quicker. Still, we're only talking about three or four times a year. You can brush out most of the dirt each day with a garment brush. Casual cotton chinos can be machine washed, though I also send my nicer, dressier cotton trousers to the dry cleaner. That includes dress chinos, moleskins, and corduroys.

For sweaters, some cotton sweatshirts can be machine washed, but most sweaters will be better served by an at-home hand wash. This is a rather simple process, and Jesse covered the howto two years ago in this post.

For shirts, pretreat any stained collars and cuffs with Octagon Bar Soap. Soak your shirt in some water, rub the soap in, and scrub with a fingernail brush. Repeat until you see the dirt rings start fading. Then roll up your wet, soapy shirt and leave it overnight in a plastic bag so that it remains moist. The next day, just launder as usual. Alex Kabbaz, one of America's best custom shirt makers,

recommends Tide's Unscented Original. I use Ecover, and mix in some Oxiclean if my shirts are extra dirty (as per Jesse's recommendation). To protect the mother of pearl buttons, I sometimes button my shirts and turn them inside out.

For machine washes, you should always try to use the cold water, gentle cycle, but if you really need to treat stains, hot water for whites and warm water for light colors is often acceptable. Dark colors, however, should always be washed with cold water. After the wash, I strongly recommend hang drying. Machine dryers can take the humidity out of your fabrics, leaving them dull and brittle, which will eventually give them a premature wornout appearance.

As always, make sure you always consult your garment's care label for more instructions. They'll usually at least tell you the bare minimum you have to adhere to.