



# The hidden cost of clothes

Read this before you head to the mall!



ou fell in love at the store, but now it's payback time. That silk top or suede jacket you splurged on seemed like such a good idea—until you came home with your first stain. Then the reality hit that cleaning costs might be many times more than the purchase price of your little treat.

Even without stains, certain fabrics must be dry-cleaned every time you wear them, or at least at the end of the season, so that they don't get damaged while they're in storage. And some materials demand the kind of attention normally reserved for family heirlooms.

"The biggest mistake people make when shopping for clothes is failing to recognize the care they'll need and following it," says Steve Boorstein, host of the DVD "Clothing Care: The Clothing Doctor's Secrets to Taking Control!" "It's important to read care labels and know which fabrics require the highest maintenance."

This guide will help you go in with your eyes open the next time you're shopping for clothes that aren't the usual easy-to-care-for polyester blends. But keep in mind that even a simple cotton blouse can run you more than \$80 a year in laundering and pressing costs if you don't iron it yourself. Plus, don't miss the 10 wardrobe-saving essentials on page 35 to help you keep your favorite things looking like new.

# The 5 biggest budget-killing fabrics



**Boots price** \$150  
**Hidden cost** \$60-85 (for professional cleaning and Ugg products)

## 1 Suede

**WORST ENEMIES** Snow- and ice-melting salt.

**WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW** You have a one- to two-day window to clean suede shoes or boots before salt stains set. To treat stains, use a mixture of 40 percent white vinegar and 60 percent water, and blot with a paper towel.

If suede footwear is simply wet, stuff it with newspaper and let it dry naturally. Then apply a suede conditioner, recommends expert David Mesquita, co-owner of Leather Spa in New York.

**HOW TO KEEP IT LOOKING NEW** After each wearing, brush suede shoes and jackets with a horsehair brush or chemical sponge to remove dirt. Store shoes on a shoe tree in a cedar closet or, better yet, on a cedar shoe tree to help retain their shape and absorb moisture and odors. You could also place a piece of cedar into your shoe, though it won't help retain the shape. On snowy or rainy days, lightly spray shoes with a water-protection formula before stepping out. Stiletto heels and pointy toes are especially vulnerable to wear and tear, so add sole guards and protective tips.

**DON'T DO IT!** Never park any suede or leather item next to a radiator to dry it; the heat will ruin the skin.

PHOTOS: WENDELL WEBBER; PROP, FASHION, AND SET STYLING: MIAKO KATOH



**Scarf price** \$25  
**Hidden cost** \$9 per year (for end-of-season dry cleaning)

## 2 Velvet

**WORST ENEMY** Moisture from rain, perspiration, and drink spills, for example.

**WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW**

There are four types of velvet: acetate, cotton, rayon, and silk.

Dry cleaners have the most luck treating silk velvet for stains and lifting the nap properly to restore its original sheen. "Sometimes a dry cleaner can lift the pile with steam and a brush," Boorstein says. So check the labels when you're shopping.

**HOW TO KEEP IT LOOKING NEW**

Velvet is vulnerable to fabric-crushing crimps. To prevent them, use a padded hanger for all of your velvet items, including scarves.

**DON'T DO IT!** Never wash velvet; you can end up changing the direction of the pile and ruining the fabric.





**Dress price**  
\$198  
**Hidden cost**  
It's anyone's guess!

### 3 Sequined, beaded, and other embellished garments

**WORST ENEMIES** Rubbing, rough handling, and steam, which causes the sequins to discolor and/or curl up.

**WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW** The care label on those kinds of garments often includes "Do not dry clean" and "Do not wash" symbols. Translation: You've purchased something that can only be spot- or hand-cleaned. You'll likely pay a premium for the process because the price is determined by many variables, such as the type of garment and the specific stain, plus it tends to be labor intensive. Lost embellishments can be very expensive to replace, if they're replaceable at all.

**HOW TO KEEP IT LOOKING NEW** Between wearings, cover the garment in tissue paper and lay it flat in a cool, dry, dark place, such as on a shelf or in a drawer.

**DON'T DO IT!** Resist the temptation to clean any spots yourself.

### Match the cleaning symbol with its meaning (good luck!)

Heartbreaking stains and rips are tough to avoid, but many wardrobe disasters can be averted by simply reading the care instructions. Too bad the symbols look like hieroglyphics! Take our little quiz to learn what many of those circles and squiggles mean. (For a full guide to care symbols, go to [www.textileaffairs.com](http://www.textileaffairs.com).)

1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Dry at low heat</li> <li>b. Do not bleach</li> <li>c. Machine dry</li> <li>d. Hand wash only</li> <li>e. No steam/iron without steam</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>f. Dry flat/lay garment on a surface</li> <li>g. Do not dry clean</li> <li>h. Do not tumble dry</li> <li>i. Dry using permanent press wrinkle-resistant setting</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>j. Wash using gentle cycle</li> <li>k. Do not wring</li> <li>l. Drip dry/hang on hanger and shape with hands</li> </ul> |
|---|---|--|

ANSWERS: a:6; b:7; c:10; d:2; e:9; f:3; g:4; h:12; i:5; j:1; k:11; l:8

ICONS: JASON LEE



**Blouse price**  
\$110  
**Hidden cost**  
\$114 per year  
(if dry-cleaned  
monthly)

## 4 Silk

**WORST ENEMIES** Perfume, sweat, deodorant, and hair spray.

**WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW** If you don't take a stained silk garment to the dry cleaner ASAP—ideally within 48 hours—discoloration can become

permanent. Some unembellished, tightly woven silks are hand-washable. But red, blue, purple, and green silk fabrics tend to bleed, so Boorstein warns against hand-washing. "Thirty-five percent of clothes that are ruined are ruined by consumers who try to wash or remove stains themselves," he says.

**HOW TO KEEP IT LOOKING NEW** Allow fragrance and hair spray to dry completely before you get dressed—the alcohol in them can cause discoloration. And go light on the deodorant or wear dress shields.

**DON'T DO IT!** Neglecting a silk garment can ruin it. If you don't wear it regularly, protect it by storing it in an opaque, breathable garment bag. The light in your closet can cause fading and ruin the color, says John-Claude Hallak, co-owner of Hallak Cleaners in New York.



## 5 Leather

**WORST ENEMIES** Lipstick, ink, body oil, and grease.

**WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW**

If you get a stain, get to a cleaner that specializes in handling leather, pronto! **HOW TO KEEP IT LOOKING NEW** Rub leather shoes with a cotton cloth after each wearing and reseal them regularly. For garments, after each wearing check the areas that are most vulnerable to soiling—the neck, collar, cuffs, pockets, and zipper placket, Boorstein says.

A little discoloration is to be expected over time, but don't wait until the area is several shades darker than the rest of the jacket or skirt to have it dry-cleaned; by then it's probably too late.

**DON'T DO IT!** Never try to get out stains yourself—you might make them worse.

**Jacket price** \$240  
**Hidden cost** up to \$80 per year (if cleaned after each season), plus \$120 for spot cleaning and conditioning





## MORE FABRIC-SAVING FACTS

### cotton

Natural fibers such as cotton, wool, and linen need extra closet space, especially those with loose weaves (if you hold a loosely woven cotton shirt up to the light, you can see through it). If you jam garments into a stuffed closet, you'll have to iron them every time you pull them out. Also, poorly done pressing shortens the life of garments.

### Lycra

(aka spandex or elastane). It's lighter and more durable than rubber, yet it's vulnerable to even the slightest bit of abrasion. Avoid crossing your legs under a knee-scraping table. And be careful when you wear belts and accessories that might rub against the material and cause fibers to snap, making it look as though you have permanent lint.

### jersey

Anything made of jersey will stretch if you place it on a hanger. Experts recommend folding the garment and storing it flat to help it maintain its shape. No choice but to hang it in the closet? Use a padded hanger for tops and a soft clip hanger for skirts and pants. Avoid using the hanging loops sewn onto knit garments; they'll distort the shape.

### polyester wool knits

The label in garments made of this material often says "Dry clean only," but you don't need to waste your money. These fabrics are often machine-washable, according to Kay Obendorf, Ph.D., professor of fiber science and senior associate dean at the College of Human Ecology at Cornell University.

### wool

Unless the garment has a complicated construction with interfacing and lining, such as a jacket, wash it yourself, says Gwen Whiting, co-owner of The Laundress in New York. Turn it inside out and hand- or machine-wash on the delicate cycle with like colors, a gentle baby shampoo, and cold water. Lay it flat to dry.

### cashmere

"Contrary to popular perception that dry cleaning is better, 100 percent cashmere is much happier when it's hand- or machine-washed on the gentle cycle in cold to warm water and laid flat to dry," says Pat Slaven, a textile engineer and tester on our staff. Avoid hanging cashmere sweaters on a rack or hanger, which can damage the fibers, leave marks, and stretch out the fabric.

## 10 tools that can keep clothes looking new

**1. Lint brush.** A good one will remove a lot more than just lint, including tiny food particles that can attract moths. You can use the type that has rolls of sticky tape (which require you to throw out each piece of tape as it fills with lint, hair, and other debris) or the type that can be rinsed to clean it.

**2. The right hangers.**

Padded hangers are ideal for delicate items such as silk tops and lingerie. Wood or plastic styles prevent stretching and puckering. Get the right size; standard sizes might be too small for a jacket or coat.

**3. Horse-hair brush or chemical sponge.** These help keep leather and suede clean, Hallak says.

**4. Pencil eraser.** It removes minor scuffs from leather shoes, handbags, and garments.

**5. Instant stain remover.** The Tide-to-Go pen and similar products from CVS and Walgreens were top picks in our recent lab test.

They can remove stains such as tea and gravy, but not from all fabrics. And we found that no stain remover got out lipstick in our tests.

**6. Handheld steamer.**

"When all you need is a touch-up not a full cleaning, a steamer allows you to DIY," Whiting says. She prefers the Jiffy Steamer

O611 Esteem, \$88. NOTE: We did not test this product in our labs.

**7. Underarm shields.**

They're an easy and cheap way to prevent pit stains. Look for ones that can attach to your bra—they can be easily removed and washed after wearing. Most shields are synthetic or made of a blend, but look

for cotton because it's more absorbent, Boorstein says.

**8. Rubbing alcohol.** It gets out ballpoint pen ink.

**9. Hydrogen peroxide.** It removes blood and red wine.

**10. White cotton cloths or napkins.** They're good for blotting (not rubbing!) food stains, Slaven says.



### Dry-cleaning warning!

The plastic wrap that protects your dry-cleaned clothes in the short term can hurt them in the long term by trapping harmful gases and moisture that might cause stains and mildew. So remove the wrapping before you put clothes away (or buy a reusable bag); do it in an open area to avoid breathing any potentially toxic fumes.