

How to Properly Load a Washing Machine for the Best Clean Every Time

Follow these steps to maximize your laundry efforts and extend the life of your washing machine and clothes.

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Doing laundry might seem like a straightforward task, but how you load the machine can make a big difference in how clean your clothes and linens emerge from the wash. A few crucial steps can help prevent damage to fabrics, reduce fading, protect your washing machine, and ensure the most effective clean. By avoiding these common laundry mistakes, such as overloading the machine and using too much detergent, you can extend the life of your clothes and your washer. Follow our tips, including how to use front-load and top-load washing machines, to get the best clean every time you do laundry.

4 Must-Know Tips for Loading a Washing Machine

Use this step-by-step approach to load a washing machine the right way.

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1. Avoid Potential Laundry Mishaps

Before loading the machine, check the pockets of all clothing (especially those in children's garments). Inspecting the clothing saves the items inside pockets from water damage while protecting the garments and your washer.

Next, prep garments to go in the washer. Zip up all zippers, fasten hooks, tie drawstrings, unroll cuffs, and turn pockets inside out. To lessen fading, turn dark clothing, such as jeans, inside out. Lastly, unbutton all buttons. The agitation of the wash cycle can cause buttons to tear buttonholes.

Be sure to [read the care labels on clothing](#) items for proper washing instructions. Most clothing will have specific laundry treatments listed on the tags.

Editor's Tip: Electronic car keys are especially susceptible to water damage. If you accidentally send keys or other small electronics through the wash cycle, do not try to use the key or turn on the device. Pushing the button while the item is wet can further damage the device. Instead, place the item in a container filled with dry rice, which helps absorb moisture. Allow the item to dry out for several days (or longer) to ensure the circuits are thoroughly dried. Then try to use it. It's not guaranteed to work, but if the circuits aren't activated while wet, they can sometimes be saved.

2. Follow Proper Loading Order

Check the loading [instructions on your washing machine's lid](#) before putting in clothes. If instructions are not available, the most common loading order is detergent, laundry items, and water. Once it's loaded, start the machine immediately.

Using the correct loading order prevents excessive suds and minimizes the risk of fabric damage that can happen when full-strength detergents sit on clothing. If a detergent dispenser is available (as in most front-loading machines), use it; the dispenser is designed to release detergent at the appropriate point in the cycle.

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3. Don't Overload the Machine

Garments packed too tightly end up wrinkled and only partially clean. Putting too many items in the machine leaves less room for water, so water circulation decreases, which limits effective cleaning.

Clothes should be distributed evenly and loosely inside the machine. Even a large load of laundry should not fill the washer tub more than three-quarters full. For a [front-load washing machine](#), pile clothes up high, but don't cram them past the last row of holes at the front (the row closest to the door). For a conventional top-loader, don't load clothes above the agitator.

Related: [Here's Why You Should \(Almost\) Always Wash Your Laundry in Cold Water](#)

A too-heavy load can damage fabrics as they rub against the agitator. "Walking" washing machines that shift out of position and noisily go off-balance during spin cycles are usually caused by overloading. Consistent overloading can bend the washer's frame or damage the motor, which will eventually require repair or replacement.

4. Add Detergent Precisely

Unless the instructions that come with your washing machine direct otherwise, add detergent before loading your dirty laundry. Keep the amount of detergent below the fill line printed on the cup, and don't add more detergent than recommended. This is particularly important if you're using a concentrated detergent or a high-efficiency washing machine, which uses less water than older machines.

Extra detergent creates extra suds during the wash cycle, carrying soils, odors, and bacteria higher up inside the tub. This leaves a residue that can affect your next load of clothes by fading colors, attracting more dirt, and making clothes look dingy. Residue buildup can also lead to the growth of bacteria and odors, so be sure to use only the amount of detergent you need for the best clean.



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