

7 laundry detergent hacks not to try

Don't waste your time, money or detergent trying these popular suggestions – our tests show that they're not worth your while

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There's a lot of advice online on how to save money by making your laundry detergent go further. We tried out some of these hacks in our lab to see if any of them actually get clothes clean, and we asked the British Skin Foundation whether any of them could cause skin problems.

We tested these hacks on a Best Buy washing machine that excelled in our tests when we used detergent in the normal way. So we know for certain that it's the hacks that don't work – not the machine.

Watch our video above to see how ineffective, and even dangerous, some of these laundry hacks could be. Read on to find out more details and what you could do instead to save money when washing your clothes.

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1. Adding bicarbonate of soda to your laundry detergent



This is one of the most common pieces of advice we've seen on boosting your detergent – using less detergent and topping up with bicarbonate of soda, aka baking soda.

We've seen claims that it helps remove stains, softens the water so you can use less detergent, gets rid of smells and makes whites whiter. It's also claimed to be great for allergies, and one comment on social media insisted that bicarbonate of soda helps water grab the dirt.

There's truth in some of this. Our tests have found it to be one of the [best home remedies for treating stains](#) – but we're talking spot-treating. Mix a tiny amount of it together with water to form a paste and apply it to the stain. Try it on an inconspicuous patch first, though, just in case it fades your favourite brightly coloured top.

Don't go adding scoopfuls of bicarbonate of soda into your laundry load, though. Although it helped to shift stains in our testing, Dr Derrick Phillips, consultant dermatologist and British Skin Foundation (BSF) spokesperson, told us that baking soda can irritate the skin and lead to underarm rashes, redness and burning.

'Most people don't know that they're sensitive to baking soda until they start applying it to their skin, and you'd need quite a lot of it to wash a large amount of clothing,' he explained.

We've tested 35 laundry powders, liquids and capsules to see which are best for busting stains. Read our [laundry detergent reviews](#) to compare effectiveness

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2. Using shower gel as laundry detergent

Of course you can use shower gel to hand-wash the odd item of clothing if you're in a pinch because you didn't bring enough socks on holiday with you. But your clothes aren't going to be anywhere near as clean as they would be if you washed them properly, and you certainly shouldn't use shower gel as a regular substitute for laundry detergent.

Shower gel made very little impact on dirty clothes in our test. By using body wash, you're not removing any dirt or bacteria sitting deep within the fibres of your clothes.

Dr Phillips told us: 'Over time, the bacteria on your clothes can transfer to your skin and cause problems such as body acne and contact dermatitis.'

If you were considering this as a way to save money, we'd suggest you use a Great Value laundry detergent instead. Some are also Best Buys, which are the best we've tested, but they're all decent options and work out cheaper compared to other laundry detergents.

Check out our roundup of [Great Value laundry detergents](#), starting at just 8p a wash

3. Using washing-up liquid instead of laundry detergent



This is a big no-no. Dr Phillips warned that washing-up liquid usually contains chemical detergents, which are noxious skin irritants.

'These foaming agents can aggravate the skin, leaving it inflamed and prone to cracking,' he said. 'This marks the start of a vicious cycle for many, as cracked skin can become vulnerable to further irritations and infections.'

It didn't do a good job of getting clothes clean in our testing, making almost no impact on stains.

And you risk creating a foamy mess in your kitchen when you open your washing machine, which you'll then have to mop up.

We tried a few [washing-up liquid cleaning hacks](#) – find out which ones worked well

4. Not using laundry detergent at all

We've seen advice online saying it's fine to skip detergent altogether, as the power of the washing machine will agitate the water and get your clothes clean.

Sadly, this isn't true. Our testing showed this won't get your clothes clean; it will just ensure they're wet and dirty.

5. Using an Ecoegg Laundry Egg for stained clothes



We had high hopes for the Ecoegg (£9.99), a refillable laundry egg that releases detergent pellets into your wash. It's an interesting concept that's designed to help tackle the problem of single-use plastic, so we'd have loved to have been able to recommend it.

However, it didn't manage to remove stains from clothes in our testing. If you use it, be prepared to wash soiled clothing twice.

Ecoegg told us that the Ecoegg contains no harsh chemicals or enzymes, making it suitable for sensitive skin. As such, it isn't designed to remove all stubborn stains in a standard washing machine cycle. Ecoegg said that you can pre-treat stains ahead of machine washing by soaking stained garments with the laundry egg for 10 minutes or overnight.

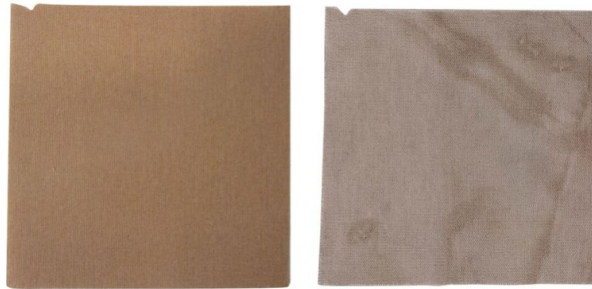
To find out which detergents make the least impact on the environment while still shifting tough stains, take a look at our [Eco Buy laundry detergent](#) recommendations.

6. Using less detergent

This one depends on what you're starting with. You should definitely avoid using too much detergent, or you're just wasting your money and over-washing your clothes – which could shorten their lifespan.

If you're going to use less than the manufacturer recommends, be sensible about it. We tested using half as much laundry detergent as recommended, and found it cleaned clothes to some degree, but not completely.

Stains remained, for example. You can see in the picture below, on the left is fabric stained with chocolate ice cream in our tests, and on the right the stains are still visible on the test patch even after a thorough wash.



If you tend to tip in random amounts of detergent in haste to get your washing done, you might want to use capsules. They're typically more expensive, but could save you money if you're unlikely to change your habits.

You could also buy a machine which has auto-dosing functionality and measures out the detergent for you the next time your washing machine needs replacing.

Take a look at our [washing machine reviews](#) to compare than 130 models we've tested

7. Mixing washing powder into a paste to use as a liquid



Some people prefer to buy powder because it's usually cheaper, but find it clogs their washing machine or doesn't dissolve properly, particularly if you're living in an area with hard water. One way to get around this is to pre-dissolve it in a little water and use it as a liquid/paste.

This worked quite well in our testing, removing most of the stains we'd applied to our test fabrics.

That said, you might just be better off buying a cheap but effective liquid detergent, especially as powder isn't always cheaper than liquids or gel. We've tested liquid laundry detergents that cost from 7p per wash ([Aldi Almat Gel Bio](#) and [Sainsbury's 2 in 1 Bio Concentrated Laundry Liquid](#)), which is the same starting price as the powders on test.

We also asked detergent manufacturers what their thoughts were on pre-dissolving their powders. Lidl told us that users should follow the instructions on the packet.

Aldi told us that you shouldn't do this with its powder, because there are ingredients in it that will be activated by contact with water. This should happen in the washing machine but not before, as that could reduce its performance. It added that a good detergent should dissolve without leaving residue without the need for pre-rinsing – and we agree.

Procter & Gamble, which makes Ariel, Bold and Daz detergent, and Unilever, which makes Persil, told us that their powder formulations are designed to dissolve properly during the wash process, so there's no need to pre-dissolve them.

Unilever added that applying such a paste directly to fabrics (to treat stains, for example) could cause colour and fabric damage due to a localised concentration of bleach in powders that contain it.

We saw some online complaints by people who said that their [washing machines](#) aren't designed to take powder, so we contacted big washing machine manufacturers Bosch, Beko and Samsung. Bosch and Samsung replied, confirming that all of their washing machines are designed to handle

washing powder, as well as liquid and gel.

Did you know that you can do more with laundry detergent than just wash clothes? Discover [5 surprising uses for laundry detergent](#)

Should you make homemade laundry detergent?

There are plenty of recipes online for making your own laundry detergent at home. We tried a mixture of baking soda, salt, liquid castile soap, lavender oil and hot water, and this did almost nothing to get our clothes clean.

Whether your homemade laundry detergent cleans your clothes to a level you're happy with, or if it leaves clothes dirty (or worse, faded), irritates your skin or clogs your machine, depends entirely on the recipe you use.

If you go down the homemade laundry detergent route, don't use vinegar, which many online articles and forum users recommend, as it can damage the rubber seals and hoses in some washing machines. You can [use vinegar to tackle a stain](#) by mixing it with warm water and applying the mixture directly, though we recommend washing the garment afterwards to avoid it smelling of vinegar.

Other ways to save money on laundry detergent

- Pick a good detergent that will get your clothes clean and avoid you having to wash them twice. Read our reviews of the [best and worst laundry detergents](#).
- Choose the right type of detergent. Many liquids and gels are good at keeping colours nice and bright, while powders tend to be better for white clothes and there's a risk of them fading colours. Capsules can struggle with ingrained stains. Some detergents cope well with most colours, but will fade yellows and blacks.
- Don't over-wash your laundry. Find out [how often you need to wash your clothes](#) and [how often you should wash your bedding](#).
- Fill your washing machine to 80%. Washing lots of smaller loads wastes water and energy, while overloading the washing machine could lead to powder being trapped within garments rather than dissolved.
- Place your capsule at the back of the drum. Manufacturers recommend doing this first, then placing your laundry on top. This stops the capsule travelling to the front of the machine, where it could get stuck to the door seal and not dissolve properly.



You can also save money on energy and water by washing during off-peak hours (though don't leave your washing machine running when you're asleep or out of the house, in case of a fire); buying an efficient washing machine next time you need a new one (our round-up of the [best washing machines](#) can help you out here), and washing at 30°C or even 20°C if your items aren't dirty.

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