How to Clean a Showerhead

Restore full water flow, remove limescale and grime, and keep the finish looking good — with plain white vinegar and water.

Time: 30–60 minutes soaking, plus about 10 minutes hands-on

How often: Every 3–6 months

Cost: Pantry basics

Works for: Removable and fixed showerheads

What You Will Need

- Distilled white vinegar (5%)
- Warm water
- A bowl, bucket or strong plastic bag
- An old toothbrush or soft brush
- Baking soda (bicarbonate of soda)
- PTFE (plumber's) tape
- Adjustable wrench and a cloth
- A pin or toothpick, and a clean cloth

Before You Start

- Check the finish first. Chrome and stainless steel cope well with vinegar. For sensitive finishes — brushed nickel, brass, oil-rubbed bronze, gold or coloured coatings — use a weaker mix (see below) and never soak longer than 30 minutes.
- Never use boiling water on a plastic showerhead or plastic parts — it can warp or crack them. Use warm water only.
- If the head will not unscrew, do not force it. Try the fixed-head bag method instead, or call a plumber — a forced fitting can snap the shower arm.

Method A — Removable Showerhead

1. **Remove the head.** Unscrew it anticlockwise by hand. If it is stiff, wrap a cloth around the nut and use an adjustable wrench gently. Keep the washer — you will need it again.

2. **Make the soak.** Mix **1 part vinegar to 1 part warm water** — for most heads, **2 cups vinegar + 2 cups water** — in a bowl or bucket deep enough to cover the head.
3. **Soak.** Place the head face-down in the solution for **30–60 minutes**. For heavy limescale, soak for up to **2 hours**. For sensitive finishes, use **1 part vinegar to 2 parts water** and soak for a **maximum of 30 minutes**.
4. **Scrub and clear the holes.** Lift the head out, scrub it with an old toothbrush, and gently poke any still-blocked spray holes with a pin or toothpick. Rinse well under clean water.
5. **Clean the filter screen.** Where the head joins the arm, lift out the small mesh filter screen, rinse it, brush away grit, and put it back. A clogged screen alone can halve your water flow.
6. **Refit.** If the old PTFE tape is worn, remove it and wrap **4–5 turns of fresh PTFE tape** clockwise around the arm thread. Screw the head on **hand-tight, then a quarter-turn** more with the wrench over a cloth. Do not overtighten.
7. **Flush.** Run the shower for **1–2 minutes** to flush out any loosened scale and vinegar before you shower.

Method B — Fixed Showerhead (Bag Method)

1. **Make the soak.** Pour **1 cup vinegar + 1 cup warm water** into a strong plastic bag.
2. **Fit the bag.** Slide the bag up over the showerhead so the head is fully submerged, then secure it tightly to the arm with a rubber band or cable tie.
3. **Soak.** Leave for **30–60 minutes** (maximum 30 minutes for sensitive finishes, using the weaker 1:2 mix). For heavy build-up, up to 2 hours for chrome or stainless heads only.
4. **Remove, scrub and flush.** Take the bag off, scrub the face with an old toothbrush, poke blocked holes gently if needed, and run the shower for **1–2 minutes**.

Cleaning the Outside

- For marks on the outside of the head, use a **baking soda paste: 3 tablespoons baking soda + 1 tablespoon water**. Rub it on gently with a soft cloth, leave a few minutes, then rinse.
- Use the paste **only** on the outside. **Never mix baking soda into the vinegar soak** — the two cancel each other out and the fizz does no useful cleaning.
- Dry and buff with a clean cloth so water spots do not dry back onto the finish.

Tick-Off Checklist

☐ Finish checked — correct vinegar strength chosen

☐ Showerhead removed (or bag fitted for a fixed head)

☐ Vinegar soak mixed — 1:1, or 1:2 for sensitive finishes

☐ Soaked 30–60 minutes (heavy scale up to 2 hours; sensitive finishes max 30 minutes)

☐ Spray holes scrubbed and cleared

☐ Filter screen cleaned and refitted

☐ Outside cleaned with baking soda paste (3 tbsp + 1 tbsp water)

☐ Fresh PTFE tape applied — 4–5 wraps

☐ Head refitted hand-tight + quarter-turn

☐ Shower flushed for 1–2 minutes

☐ Full, even spray restored

⚠ Safety — Do Not:

- Never pour boiling water over a plastic showerhead or plastic parts.
- Never force a stuck showerhead — use the bag method or call a plumber.
- Never mix vinegar with bleach or any other cleaner.
- Never soak a sensitive finish longer than 30 minutes, and always test a hidden spot first if you are unsure.
- Never overtighten the refitted head — hand-tight plus a quarter-turn is

> enough.

Still Not Spraying Properly?

- **Weak flow after cleaning:** check the filter screen again and the shower hose for kinks; limescale further up the arm may need a plumber.
- **A few holes still blocked:** repeat the soak once, then poke the holes gently — never with a knife or drill.
- **Leaking at the joint:** re-wrap with fresh PTFE tape (4–5 wraps) and refit hand-tight plus a quarter-turn. If it still leaks, the washer may need replacing.
- **Finish damaged or flaking:** stop using vinegar on it and replace the head — damaged coatings cannot be restored by cleaning.

Remember: a quick wipe after showers and a proper clean every 3–6 months keeps the spray strong and the head lasting years longer.

Notes