How to Remove Coffee, Wine and Grease Stains

Coffee on your favourite shirt, red wine on the tablecloth, grease from the frying pan — all three come out if you act fast and use the right method for each one.

> **Golden rule:** Blot, never rub. And never put a stained item in the dryer until the stain is completely gone — dryer heat sets coffee, wine and grease stains, often permanently.

Before You Start

- **Check the care label first.** If it says “dry clean only”, take it to a dry cleaner and point out the stain — do not try these methods at home.
- **Test a hidden spot.** Dab your chosen solution on an inside seam or hem, wait 5 minutes, and check for colour change or damage before treating the visible stain.
- **Work from the outside in.** This stops the stain spreading into clean fabric.
- **Never mix bleach with other cleaners**, especially vinegar or ammonia — this creates harmful fumes. Use one treatment at a time, and rinse between methods.

What You Will Need

- Clean white cloths or paper towels (coloured cloths can transfer dye)
- Cold water, warm water, mild liquid dish soap (clear, not coloured)
- Distilled white vinegar (5%), baking soda, table salt, cornstarch
- 3% hydrogen peroxide (for white / light fabrics only)
- A soft brush or old toothbrush, laundry detergent

Coffee Stains

Coffee is a tannin stain, and fresh coffee is far easier to remove than a dried one. Speed matters more than fancy products here.

1. **Blot immediately** — never rub — with a clean white cloth or paper towel to lift as much coffee as possible. Rubbing pushes the stain deeper into the fibres.
2. **Rinse from the back.** Hold the stained area under cold running water, with the water running through the *back* of the stain, for 1–2 minutes. This pushes the coffee out instead of driving it further in. Never use hot water first — heat can set a coffee stain.
3. **Treat with dish soap.** Mix 1 tablespoon of mild liquid dish soap with 2 cups of cold water. Sponge the solution onto the stain and blot with a clean cloth. Repeat until no more colour transfers to the cloth.
4. **Vinegar rinse (if a brown shadow remains).** Mix 1 part white vinegar with 2 parts cold water. Dab it onto the remaining mark, leave for 5–10 minutes, then blot and rinse with cold water.
5. **Wash as normal** on the coolest setting the care label allows, using your normal detergent. Check before drying — if any shadow remains, repeat the dish-soap and vinegar steps. Only tumble dry or iron once the stain is fully gone.

Dried coffee stains

Soak the item in cold water with 1 tablespoon of dish soap per litre for 30 minutes, then follow the dish-soap and vinegar steps above.

Coffee on carpet or upholstery

Blot, then sponge with the dish-soap solution (1 tablespoon per 2 cups of cold water), blotting with a clean cloth each time. Rinse by sponging with plain cold water, then blot dry. Do not soak the carpet — excess water can damage the backing.

Red Wine Stains

Red wine looks dramatic, but it is not the disaster people think — as long as you do not panic and scrub it.

1. **Blot immediately** and gently with a clean white cloth. Do not rub, and do not press the wine deeper into the fabric.
2. **Absorb with salt or baking soda.** While the stain is still damp, cover it generously with table salt or baking soda. Both draw the wine out of the fibres as they dry. Leave for 15–20 minutes, or until the powder looks pink and dry, then shake or brush it off outdoors.
3. **Rinse from the back** under cold running water for 1–2 minutes, just as with coffee.
4. **Treat with dish soap and vinegar.** Mix 1 tablespoon of dish soap, 1 tablespoon of white vinegar and 2 cups of cold water. Sponge onto the stain and blot repeatedly with a clean cloth until the colour stops transferring.
5. **Hydrogen peroxide — white and light fabrics only.** If a pink shadow remains on a white or very light-coloured item, dab 3% hydrogen peroxide directly onto the mark, leave for 10–15 minutes, then rinse well with cold water. **Never use hydrogen peroxide on coloured or dark fabrics** — it can bleach them. Always test a hidden spot first.
6. **Wash as normal** on a cool cycle with normal detergent. Check before drying; repeat the dish-soap and vinegar step if needed. Only dry once the stain is gone.

Dried red wine stains

Soak in cold water with 1 tablespoon of dish soap per litre for 1 hour, then follow the dish-soap and vinegar steps. For a stubborn dried stain on white fabric, soak for up to 30 minutes in a solution of 1 part hydrogen peroxide to 2 parts cold water — whites only, and test first.

Red wine on carpet

Blot, cover with salt or baking soda for 20 minutes, vacuum up the powder, then sponge with the dish-soap solution, blotting — never scrubbing — and finish with a plain cold-water sponge and blot dry.

Grease Stains

Grease — cooking oil, butter, salad dressing, or a splash from the frying pan — needs a different approach. Water alone will not cut it, and hot water first can actually spread it.

1. **Blot and absorb.** Blot off any excess with a paper towel. If the stain is fresh, sprinkle baking soda or cornstarch generously over it and leave for 15–20 minutes to absorb the oil, then brush off.
2. **Apply dish soap directly.** Dish soap is designed to cut grease, which makes it the best first treatment. Apply a few drops of clear liquid dish soap directly onto the stain and work it in gently with your fingers or a soft toothbrush. Leave for 10–15 minutes.
3. **Rinse with warm water** (not boiling) from the back of the stain. For delicate fabrics, use lukewarm water and check the care label.

4. **Wash as normal** on the warmest setting the care label allows, using your normal detergent. Check before drying — if a dark grease shadow remains, repeat the dish-soap step. Never tumble dry until the stain is gone, or the heat will set it permanently.

Dried or set-in grease stains

Apply dish soap, leave for 30 minutes, then wash as above. For a stubborn stain on a washable white fabric, a paste of 3 tablespoons of baking soda mixed with 1 tablespoon of water, left for 15 minutes before washing, can help lift the residue.

Grease on carpet or upholstery

Blot, sprinkle with baking soda for 20 minutes, vacuum, then sponge with a solution of 1 tablespoon of dish soap in 2 cups of warm water, blotting repeatedly. Rinse by sponging with plain water and blot dry.

■ Safety — read first: Never put a stained item in the dryer until the stain is gone. Never mix bleach with vinegar, ammonia or any other cleaner. Hydrogen peroxide is for white and light fabrics only — test a hidden spot first. Silk, wool and "dry clean only" items should go to a professional cleaner. Never rub a stain.

Tick-Off Checklist

Tick each step as you finish it.

- ☐ Care label checked — item is machine-washable (not "dry clean only")
- ☐ Hidden spot tested — waited 5 minutes, no colour change or damage
- ☐ Coffee: blotted immediately, never rubbed
- ☐ Coffee: rinsed from the back under cold water for 1–2 minutes
- ☐ Coffee: treated with dish-soap solution (1 tbsp per 2 cups cold water)
- ☐ Coffee: vinegar rinse applied if needed (1 part vinegar to 2 parts water, 5–10 minutes)
- ☐ Red wine: blotted immediately, never rubbed
- ☐ Red wine: covered with salt or baking soda for 15–20 minutes, then brushed off
- ☐ Red wine: rinsed from the back under cold water for 1–2 minutes
- ☐ Red wine: treated with dish-soap and vinegar solution (1 tbsp each in 2 cups cold water)
- ☐ Red wine: hydrogen peroxide used only on white / light fabrics, 10–15 minutes, tested first
- ☐ Grease: excess blotted, baking soda or cornstarch left for 15–20 minutes, brushed off
- ☐ Grease: dish soap applied directly, left for 10–15 minutes
- ☐ Grease: rinsed with warm water from the back of the stain
- ☐ Item washed on the correct cycle and checked before drying
- ☐ Item only tumble-dried or ironed once the stain is completely gone
- ☐ No bleach mixed with any other cleaner at any stage

Notes