How to Remove Mattress Stains

Fresh, clean, and odour-free — without soaking your mattress or damaging the fabric.

The Golden Rule

Never soak a mattress. The inside cannot dry properly, and trapped moisture grows mould and mildew deep inside where you cannot reach it. Work with damp cloths only, and always dry the mattress completely before remaking the bed.

Quick facts: Time — 30 minutes of active cleaning, plus 4–8 hours drying | Difficulty — Easy | Cost — Pantry basics

SAFETY — PLEASE READ FIRST

• Use damp cloths only — never pour water or cleaner directly onto the mattress. Spray onto a cloth, or use a light mist.

• Never mix cleaners. Do not combine bleach with vinegar, or hydrogen peroxide with vinegar. Use one method at a time, and rinse your cloth between steps.

• Test a hidden spot first — try your cleaner on a small area near the edge or corner. Wait 10 minutes and check for colour change or damage.

• Ventilate the room — open windows and run a fan. Good airflow speeds drying and stops musty smells.

• Wear gloves when treating urine, blood, or mouldy stains, and keep children and pets away until the mattress is fully dry.

What You Will Need

- Clean white cloths and old towels (coloured cloths can transfer dye)
- Mild dish soap — 1 tablespoon per 2 cups (480 ml) of cool water
- Baking soda (bicarbonate of soda) — about 1 cup per treatment
- Distilled white vinegar (5%) in a spray bottle
- 3% hydrogen peroxide (household grade) — for stubborn stains only
- An old toothbrush or soft brush
- A vacuum cleaner with an upholstery attachment
- A fan or open window for drying

Step by Step — The Method That Works for Most Stains

1. Strip the Bed and Blot — Don't Rub

Remove all bedding and wash it separately. If the stain is fresh, blot it immediately with a clean towel, pressing firmly to absorb as much liquid as possible. **Never rub** — rubbing pushes the stain deeper into the fibres and spreads it wider. Keep blotting with fresh sections of the towel until no more liquid transfers.

2. Vacuum the Whole Mattress

Vacuum the entire surface slowly, including seams and sides, using the upholstery attachment. This removes dust, crumbs, and loose dirt so they do not turn to mud when you clean.

3. Spot-Clean with Mild Soapy Water

Mix 1 tablespoon of mild dish soap into 2 cups (480 ml) of cool water. Dampen a white cloth in the solution and wring it out well. Dab the stain gently, working from the outside edge toward the centre so it does not spread. Rinse the cloth in clean cool water, wring it out, and dab again to lift the soap. Repeat until the stain fades. Never use hot water on protein stains (blood, sweat, urine) — heat sets them permanently.

4. Deodorise with Baking Soda

While the area is still slightly damp, sprinkle a generous layer of baking soda over the stain — about 1 cup for a single spot, more for a large area. Baking soda absorbs moisture and neutralises odours. Leave it for **at least 4 hours, ideally 8 hours or overnight**. Then vacuum it up thoroughly. This step alone removes most lingering smells.

5. Dry Completely Before Remaking the Bed

This is the step people skip — and regret. Let the mattress air-dry fully, ideally **4–8 hours** with windows open and a fan blowing across it. Press a dry towel onto the treated area: if it comes away damp, keep waiting. Only remake the bed when the mattress is completely dry to the touch. Sleeping on a damp mattress traps moisture and invites mould.

Stain-by-Stain Guide

Sweat and Yellow Marks

Make a paste of 3 tablespoons of baking soda mixed with 1 tablespoon of water. Spread it over the yellowed area, leave for 30 minutes, then wipe off with a cloth dampened in cool water and dry. For deeper yellowing, lightly mist 3% hydrogen peroxide over the area (light-coloured mattresses only — it can bleach dark fabrics), leave for 10–15 minutes, blot with a damp cloth, then dry fully. Always test a hidden spot first.

Urine

Act fast: blot up as much as possible, then spray the area lightly with undiluted white vinegar. Leave for 10–15 minutes — vinegar breaks down the uric acid that causes the smell. Blot with a clean damp cloth to lift the vinegar, then cover generously with baking soda and leave for 8 hours or overnight before vacuuming. For an old, dried urine stain, repeat the vinegar step twice before the baking soda. Never use ammonia-based cleaners on urine — they smell like urine to pets and encourage repeat accidents.

Blood — Cold Water Only, Never Hot

Hot water cooks the proteins in blood and sets the stain permanently. Dampen a cloth with cold water and blot the stain, working from the outside in. For a dried blood stain, make a paste of 2 tablespoons of cornstarch (or baking soda) mixed with cold water, spread it over the stain, and leave until it dries completely (about 30–60 minutes). Brush or vacuum off the dried paste, then blot any remaining mark with cold water. Repeat if needed. For stubborn blood on a light mattress, a light mist of 3% hydrogen peroxide left for 10 minutes can help — test a hidden spot first, and never use it on dark or coloured fabric.

Spills, Food, and Drink

Blot immediately, then spot-clean with the mild soapy solution above. For coffee or tea, dab with a cloth dampened in a mix of 1 tablespoon of white vinegar in 1 cup (240 ml) of cool water, then follow with soapy water and a clean-water rinse. For greasy food stains, sprinkle baking soda on the spot first to absorb the grease, leave for 30 minutes, vacuum, then spot-clean.

Mould or Mildew Spots

Small surface spots can be treated, but mould inside a mattress cannot be safely cleaned at home. For a small surface spot, wipe gently with a cloth dampened in undiluted white vinegar, leave for 10 minutes, then wipe with a clean damp cloth and dry thoroughly with a fan. If the mould covers a large area, smells strongly, or returns after cleaning, **stop and replace the mattress** — the mould is almost certainly inside, where no surface cleaner can reach it.

Protect It Afterwards

- Use a waterproof mattress protector — it stops the next stain before it starts and is far easier to wash than a mattress.
- Vacuum monthly and air the mattress for a few hours when you change the sheets.
- Rotate the mattress every 3–6 months (head to foot) for even wear, if your mattress type allows it.
- Keep drinks and food off the bed where possible — most stains are preventable.

When to Call a Professional — or Replace

Call a professional upholstery cleaner if a large stain will not budge after two treatments, or if the mattress smells strongly after full drying. Replace the mattress if: mould has spread inside it, it sags or has broken springs, it smells musty even after cleaning and drying, or it is more than 8–10 years old and stained through. No cleaning method restores a mattress that is structurally worn out.

What NOT to Do

- Do not pour water or cleaner directly onto the mattress — damp cloths only.
- Do not use hot water on blood, sweat, or urine stains — it sets them.
- Do not use bleach on a mattress — it damages fabric, irritates skin, and its fumes linger.
- Do not mix vinegar with bleach or hydrogen peroxide.
- Do not steam-clean a mattress unless the manufacturer explicitly allows it — steam drives moisture deep inside.
- Do not remake the bed while the mattress is still damp.

Tick-Off Checklist

Tick each step as you finish it.

- [ ] Bed stripped; bedding washed separately
- [ ] Fresh stain blotted (never rubbed) with a clean towel
- [ ] Whole mattress vacuumed, including seams and sides
- [ ] Spot-cleaned with mild soapy water (1 tbsp dish soap per 2 cups cool water), dabbed from outside in
- [ ] Stain-specific treatment done (sweat paste / vinegar for urine / cold water for blood)
- [ ] Baking soda sprinkled generously (about 1 cup) and left 4–8 hours
- [ ] Baking soda vacuumed up thoroughly

- [ ] Mattress dried completely (4–8 hours, fan + open window) before remaking the bed
- [ ] Waterproof mattress protector fitted
- [ ] No bleach, hot water on protein stains, or mixed cleaners used

Notes