

How To Take Care Of Your Sleeping Bag

Super psyched on your new sleeping bag and wondering how to take care of it? Or looking for tips on how to make your old bag last longer? Read on for a few basics that will keep your outdoor adventures epic (or at least a lot more comfortable) for years to come.

STORAGE

Whether you have a bag filled with down or synthetic insulation, both work on the same principle: they trap air to keep you warm. For this reason it's important to store your bag "uncompressed" so the insulation doesn't get crushed and lose its ability to loft back out when you want to sleep in it.

Your bag should come with two storage sacks. One will be large and made of mesh, cotton, or some other light, breathable material. This is the long-term storage sack, meaning it's OK for your sleeping bag to be stashed in for extended periods of time. The other bag that comes with your sleeping bag is the stuff sack. This one is much smaller and made of more durable material. You can also purchase a compression sack, which has external straps that help you shrink the sleeping bag down to the smallest possible size. Doing this won't damage the insulation as long as it's not kept that way for an extended period of time.



On the left is Kelty's compression sack for camping and to the right is the storage sack for the SB20 Sleeping Bag.

Pro tip

Hang your sleeping bag up by the loops on the foot of the bag in a dry place out of direct sunlight. This allows the insulation to be fully uncompressed while your bag is in storage and ensures a long life for you bag. If you're short on space, lay your bag under your bed so it stays fully lofted and out of your way.

PROPER USE

Keep your bag clean and protect it from abrasion. Most of the time this is easy, because your bag is inside a tent on a sleeping pad. Be mindful of dirty boots and make sure you never step on your bag with shoes on.

If your bag gets wet from rain, dew, frost, condensation, or your own perspiration, make sure you dry it out. It's best if you can dry it out of direct sunlight—UV rays can damage materials—but sometimes, especially when you're camping in the snow, throwing it out in the sun is the only way. Try not to compress the bag when it's wet. This is especially important for down; if you compress wet down, it won't loft out until it dries.

WASHING

Let's face it: eventually your bag is going to get dirty, despite your best efforts. You crawl into that thing after hiking all day, and it's going to get dirty and stinky and need a wash. This is where the kind of bag you have does make a difference: a down bag will need to be washed differently than a synthetic bag.



For **down**, you'll want to use a laundry soap that's made for washing down. Nikwax down wash works great. Each down plume is coated with natural oils that help protect it and help it to loft out to trap air. If the plumes get dirty, they lose their ability to loft to their full potential, meaning the bag won't be as warm as it should be. Washing down with normal laundry detergent will strip it of its oils, so despite being clean, it can't loft the way it used to, and it will get dirtier faster. Down wash cleans while maintaining those natural oils and keeps the down performing for a long time.

For **synthetic** bags, use Nikwax base wash, made for cleaning synthetic materials. It will clean your bag inside and out and help it last longer and work better for you for years to come.

After washing, you can dry your sleeping bags in a dryer on a low setting. If your sleeping bag is filled with down, be sure to toss in a clean tennis ball or two halfway through the cycle to break up clumps of down and restore the insulation's loft. It's noisy but effective.

REPAIR

Find a hole in your bag? There are a few options out there. Tenacious Tape made by Gear Aid is my favorite. It sticks to nylon fabrics well, and it's flexible so it won't get ruined by being pulled in and out of stuff sacks.



A very old repair with Tenacious Tape.

Duct tape will also work as a short-term fix, but you'll need to keep replacing it since its stickiness wears out and you run the risk of enlarging the hole if the tape comes off while you're stuffing the bag into sack or removing it. If you're a seamstress, you can try sewing a patch on. And lastly, your most expensive but best long-term fix will be sending it back to the manufacturer for repair. Most brands have repair facilities, and for a modest fee they will fix your gear (one of the benefits of spending a little extra on a quality bag).

If you buy a quality sleeping bag and care for it properly, there's no reason it won't last for years and years of regular use.