Stain removal cheat sheet

First steps for six common stains

Blood

Rinse or soak fresh blood in cold water, never hot, then wash as usual. For dried stains, soak in warm water with an enzyme laundry product before washing. Do not put the item in the dryer until the stain has gone.

Red wine

Blot up what you can, then sponge or soak the stain in cool water for about 30 minutes. Pretreat with a stain remover and wash, adding bleach only if the fabric's care label allows it.

Coffee or tea

Sponge or soak the stain in cool water, pretreat with a stain remover or liquid detergent, then wash with a bleach that is safe for the fabric. Older stains may need an enzyme product before washing.

Grease or oil

For light grease, work liquid detergent or a stain remover into the stain and wash in the hottest water the fabric allows. For heavy oil, place the stain face down on paper towels and treat it from the back before washing.

Ink

Dab rubbing alcohol around and then onto the stain, place it face down on paper towels and apply more alcohol from the back, changing the towels often. Rinse and wash. Some inks may not come out completely.

Sweat

For sweat marks, pretreat with a stain remover or bar soap and wash in the hottest water the fabric allows. For deodorant marks, pretreat with liquid detergent, or a stain remover and oxygen bleach for heavy build-up.

Never mix

Never mix bleach with anything except water. Bleach plus ammonia makes toxic chloramine gas, and bleach plus acids (vinegar, many toilet, limescale and rust cleaners) releases chlorine gas. Use one product at a time, rinse between them, and keep the room ventilated.