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How to Clean Undergarments and Delicates

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William Abranowicz

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Because it is worn so often and loses elasticity over time, a bra generally lasts no longer than two years. But proper laundering can help ensure that bras and other intimates age gracefully. So how delicate do you need to be with delicates? Perhaps not as delicate as you think.

Everyday Bras and Lingerie
Most lingerie can be put through the machine's gentle cycle, even if the labels say "hand wash." Use all-purpose detergent with cotton and synthetics; opt for mild detergent with lacy fabrics. Pretreat yellow perspiration stains by rubbing them with mild soap and warm water; let soak for 30 minutes. Protect hosiery, bras, bustiers, camisoles, slips, and any other garments with straps or underwires by placing them in **zippered mesh bags, which will keep them from twisting or snagging; fasten clasps to prevent them from catching on the netting.** Use a bag with fine mesh so hooks can't get through, says Steve Boorstein, author of *The Clothing Doctor's 99 Secrets to Clothing Care* (Boutique, \$20, www.amazon.com); try the Woolite Fine Washables bag (\$4, www.containerstore.com). Wash undergarments in light loads, and never throw them in with heavy items, as these can cause wires to bend or break, says Chris Allsbrooks, a textile analyst at the Drycleaning & Laundry Institute, in Laurel, Maryland. Or use a handy contraption like the BraBall (\$25, www.braballs.com), a plastic sphere that holds up to three bras and can be tossed in the washer. Air-dry to prevent damage to underwires and straps; invest in a drying rack like the Compact Accordion dryer by Polder (\$25, www.amazon.com).

Fine Bras and Lingerie

Hand washing is often the best way to care for ornate pieces and those made of delicate fabrics, like silk. Try Woolite fabric wash (from \$4 for 16 ounces) or the Laundress Delicate Wash (\$18 for 16 ounces, www.thelaundress.com). Let the pieces soak for a few minutes in warm or cool water, then gently squeeze the suds through the fabric; rinse and roll in a towel to absorb excess moisture before hanging them to dry. Bras, nightgowns, and the like are not apt to be heavily soiled, so "hand washing gets them cleaner than you might think," says Allsbrooks. Her advice: **Clean lingerie while you're in the shower.** Get the article wet, lather a pea-size amount of mild shampoo or baby shampoo in your hands and wash, as suggested, then air-dry.

*Written by Sarah Stebbins
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