

The ACS Essential Carpet Survival Guide.

Carpet cleaning is essential, just as washing clothes, or even washing our bodies is essential if we want to remain healthy and perform well.

If carpet is to look beautiful, perform its purpose, last well, and remain hygienic, it HAS to be cleaned from time to time.

It's common sense that beautiful new carpets won't remain that way indefinitely without some regular maintenance.

Of course, cleaning and caring for carpets involves some investment, of money and time, however, a properly maintained carpet can look 'like new' for many years, and the cost of maintenance is always far lower than the expense of unnecessary replacement.

Economically, regular cleaning can more than quadruple the life of a carpet, effectively making the cleaning 'free'.

A decent quality household carpet would typically fall into the £25 - £50 per square metre range, meaning a modest 150 square metre home costs between £3,750 and £7,500 to carpet. A large home would be many times that amount. And a good quality carpet even more.

That being the case, it is well worth taking good care to maintain your carpets!

Often people leave cleaning their carpet until it looks dirty.

That's understandable. The trouble is that modern carpet is superbly designed to hide dirt. By the time a carpet looks dirty, it's actually very heavily soiled!

Think for a minute, if you had a wooden or vinyl floor would you clean it every two, three, or more years? Of course not. That's because you could see the floor getting dirty, and it would feel sticky.

With carpet it's different. Carpet gets dirty gradually without you noticing. The dirt settles down into the pile and builds up. These embedded oils, soils, and grits have damaging effects on your carpets, causing rapid wear.

What's In Your Carpet?

Soils are tracked in on shoes, they may come from food or drink spillages, or from clothing, from skin cells, skin or hair oils, pet hair and oils, or from cleaning products such as aerosol sprays.

Anything that floats in the air or gets carried in by people or animals can end up settling in the carpet. It is the largest flat surface in a building. Pretty much everything can end up there, and does eventually.

Most carpet soiling is composed of around 80% particulate soiling, such as sandy soils, grit etc. around 8% - 15% of carpet soils are oily soils, about 10% are water soluble soils, and the remainder are GKW (good knows what).

How Often Should You Clean Your Carpets?

This is one of the most often asked questions from my 30+ years as a cleaning specialist, and the answer is...it depends!

If you have good quality dense pile carpet. If you have low levels of foot traffic (no kids or pets) and you always take off your shoes at the door. If you carefully vacuum twice every week, and you have an expert professional cleaning company use a low moisture, ph neutral cleaning system on your carpet, you really only need to clean the carpet every 1 or 2 years.

More often wouldn't hurt, but it's really not necessary unless you are having visitors you want to impress!

If you have a large family with several children and pets. People who don't remove their shoes. Perhaps vacuuming is not done regularly, and cleaning is done by a 'cheap and cheerful' or budget company you'll need to clean every 3 - 4 months or damage may be occurring.

Shaws Industries the worlds' largest carpet maker, and Dupont one of the worlds' largest fibre manufacturers recommend professional cleaning every 6 – 18 months depending on usage.

The key is always, clean before it looks dirty.

If your carpet hasn't been cleaned in the last 1 –2 years, don't put it off any longer. If you've just moved into a new home, clean the carpets immediately – you never know what might be in them!

As a general rule I have found yearly cleaning to be perfectly adequate for most people. It is not too often to be prohibitively expensive, yet often enough to keep carpets looking good.

Which Method of Cleaning Is Best?

There are basically three carpet cleaning methods, dry cleaning, low moisture cleaning, and 'steam' cleaning, (usually not steam), correctly called spray/extraction.

Dry cleaning frankly, is not that good for most situations. It's a chemical only clean. No water is involved. Imagine trying to wash your clothes with solvent and a cloth! I only use it or recommend it when cleaning non-colourfast fabrics that will ruin if wet cleaned.

'Steam' cleaning, actually hot water (and with some firms they just use cold water) will leave your carpets very wet. I use this method very rarely, and only for very specialised conditions. **If a carpet shrinks, stretches, splits or goes mouldy underneath, it's from 'steam' cleaning.** It can't happen with dry cleaning or low moisture cleaning.

Low Moisture Cleaning. All of the biggest improvements in carpet cleaning in the last 15 or more years have been in the field of low moisture cleaning and fast drying.

This method gives cleaning results as good as, or better, than so-called 'steam' cleaning, yet leaves your carpets ready-to-use almost as quickly as dry cleaning. Our average drying time is around 30 – 60 minutes, and I've had carpets dry in less than 20 minutes. It is also safer (completely safe), stays clean longer, and is more environmentally friendly.

In addition to the above, many 'steam', or spray/extraction carpet cleaners don't use a rinse in their cleaning method (because it costs more in materials, and takes longer to do, so they make less money) and so a lot of chemical residue is left behind in your carpet.

Chemical residues left in your carpets cause very rapid re-soiling. Dirt really sticks to these cleaning solutions. That's what they are designed for. When the chemical is sprayed into your carpet, the dirt chemically bonds with it and is removed with the solution.

When much of this cleaning chemical is left behind in your carpet, it continues doing its job, attracting dirt!

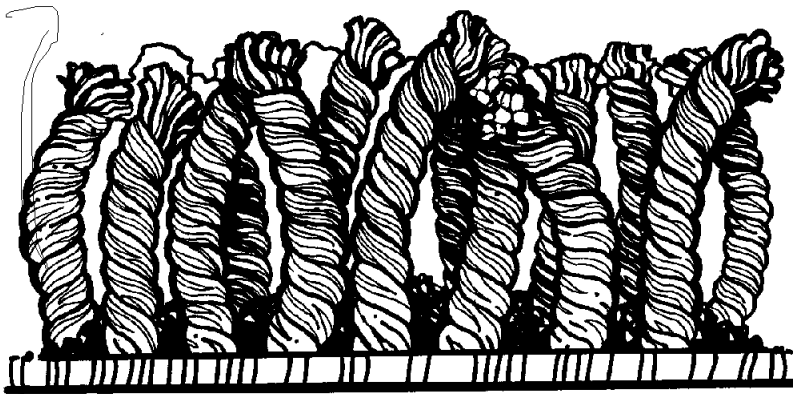
That's why people have often said, *"my carpet seemed to get dirty again very quickly after I had it cleaned."*

Cleaning chemicals were probably left in the carpet, after cleaning.

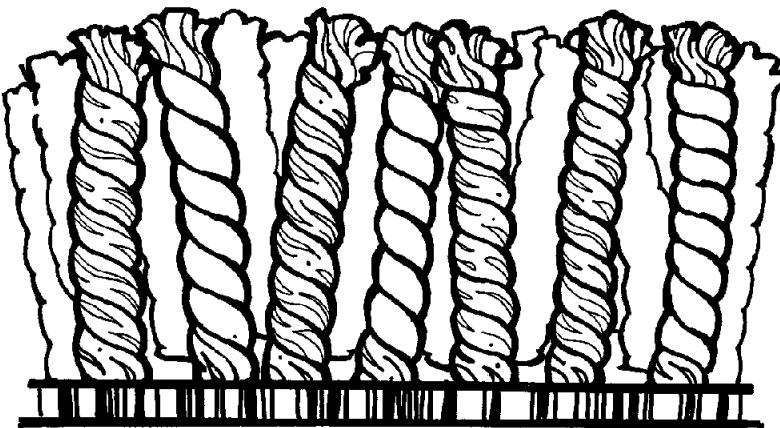
They must be removed or neutralised. And ideally, not used in the first place.

Otherwise, very rapid re-soiling occurs. Worse still, your carpet can become hard and brittle. Carpet fibres can crush, losing their 'bounce' (it's known as resilience). Your carpet becomes matted, hard. And wears out faster.

Carpets improperly cleaned will soon deteriorate, and rapidly look dirty again. Carpets properly cared for can last three or four times as long, and keep their 'like new' look.



Carpets left too wet and full of cleaning solution residues attract dirt fast, get matted quickly, and soon look dirty again.



Carpets left dryer and free of cleaning solution residues look better and stay cleaner for longer

Stain Removal Guide.

Whenever attempting stain removal, always follow the procedure below.

- Don't Panic! Panic can cause us to make mistakes that can be permanent.

- Always pre-test any carpet for problems such as colour loss, pile damage or colour change. If unsure call a professional.

- Scoop up solids and blot up liquids first - *avoid rubbing the carpet surface.*

- For individual stains, follow the instructions on any spotting product you have. An ethical professional will be pleased to give you a safe, inexpensive emergency spotter. Use caution, some retail products contain bleaches which can permanently change the colour of your carpet.

- For spots of unknown origin, apply solvents (for greasy/oily stains) first, followed by water-based spot removal agents.

- In all cases, apply the agent to clean towel, not directly to the stain. Use **small** quantities at a time - always work from the edge of stain inwards towards the centre. As a final treatment, rinse spot with clean water - **do not over wet.**

- Blot as dry as possible with clean tissue or towelling.

Tip: Some spots and stains require specialist professional treatments. Attempting DIY treatment can make stains permanent.

How To Keep Your Carpet Looking Beautiful All the time,

Here is my simple 5 step plan to keep your carpets looking beautiful all the time.

1. Keep dirt outside. The less soiling that comes in, the less there will be to spoil your beautiful carpets. Use entry mats at doorways. Make sure they are big enough that people can't just step over them. Take outdoor shoes off at the entrance.
2. Vacuum properly. Vacuuming needs to be done in slow movements to get the most soiling out of carpets. Vacuum from different directions. Vacuum at least weekly, preferably more.
3. Deal with spills immediately. Never leave a spill till later. Blot spills up, never scrub. Use a spotter that professionals use. If off-the-shelf products were that good, all professionals would be using them! A reputable carpet cleaner would provide you with a professional spotter for a reasonable fee. If you are a regular client he should provide it for free!

4. Plan your carpet cleaning. Plan it now, and put it in your diary. Every year should be about right. Busy homes every 6 – 12 months, less busy every two years.

5. Protect your investment. Always renew your carpet stain retardant every one to two years. New carpet is very expensive, stain protection is very inexpensive.

Follow these 5 simple rules and you'll have every chance of keeping your carpets looking great and lasting longer.