

# How to Get Rid of Annoying Static Cling Without Toxic Products

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Dry air increases the amount of static cling you find in your clothes and the static shocks you get from touching objects after walking over carpet
- › Although fabric softeners and dryer sheets help remove static electricity from your clothes, they are filled with toxic chemicals known to trigger central nervous system damage, cancer and asthma
- › Natural alternatives to prevent static electricity in your clothes include making your own fabric softener or dryer sheets, using a paper clip on your clothing or including a moist towel at the end of the dryer cycle

***Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published December 31, 2016.***

A dry climate or cold weather increases the amount of static cling you find in your clothes. While this can be a nuisance in your sweaters, suits and shirts, common over-the-counter treatments trigger damage to your health and the environment. Fortunately, there are alternatives that are both less expensive and safer.

Manufacturers take advantage of two of your senses to boost sales when they develop dryer sheets and fabric softeners — [smell](#) and touch. Your sense of smell is a primal and powerful ability, allowing you to recognize and remember up to 1 trillion different smells.<sup>1</sup>

Psychologists understand that scent has the power to evoke a positive or negative reaction within milliseconds.<sup>2</sup> When manufacturers combine positive feelings about the softness and scent of your clothing with their product, you're more likely to buy it.

However, while static cling is frustrating, there are other natural, less expensive and less hazardous ways of treating your clothing during the wash and dry cycles.

## How Does Static Cling Develop?

An explanation of how static cling develops on your clothing, or how you get an electric shock after walking over carpeting and touching a door handle, quickly gets complicated. The short explanation is that static is a buildup of negative or positive electrical charges in your hair, clothing or in your body.<sup>3</sup>

Within each physical object are very small particles, called atoms. Each atom is made of positively charged protons, negatively charged electrons and neutral neutrons.

Like magnets, opposite charges attract each other and same charges repel each other. When an object has an imbalance of negative and positive charges, **static electricity** develops and you experience static cling. These charges build on the exterior of an object until they can be released.

This can happen when two objects rub against each other, like a balloon and the wall, or your clothes and the dryer walls, causing atoms to break free and bunch together.<sup>4</sup> When two objects rub together, such as your shoes on carpet, the object (your body) collects negative electrons.

When you touch someone or something, you feel the surplus electrons being discharged as static shock. The same thing happens when you pull your winter hat off and your hair stands on end.

Remember, same charges repel each other, so each strand of your hair moves away from the others, making it appear that your hair is standing out. When your clothes come out of the dryer they are also charged.

The clothing will cling to itself when a positively charged portion of the material comes up against a negatively charged portion. The same is true on your body. When a negatively charged portion of your clothes comes close to protons on your body, the clothing clings.

It is much more difficult for this transfer of electrons to happen if you walk on wood floors since wood does not acquire or get rid of electrons easily.

Metal, however, does allow the flow of electrons easily, and whatever charge you pick up will shift to a metal object, including your computer.<sup>5</sup> Many computer cases are made from hard plastics to prevent damage from static.

## **What's Wrong with Dryer Sheets and Fabric Softeners?**

Using fabric softeners and dryer sheets to get rid of static cling or adding fragrance to your clothing is dangerous to your health.

Manufacturers of these products are not required to disclose the ingredients, and are self-regulated through the International Fragrance Association (IFA). A 2015 report exposed where this self-regulation has failed.<sup>6</sup>

Manufacturers develop their fragrances by mixing a chemical cocktail to produce a scent, without regulation for the long-term consequences of exposure to those chemicals. The company must only identify "fragrance" on the label without listing the ingredients used to make the fragrance.<sup>7</sup> Alexandra Scranton, lead author of the report, commented:<sup>8</sup>

*"The safety of fragrance chemicals is not determined, monitored or safeguarded by any governmental agency globally in any comprehensive fashion. Allowing the fragrance industry to self-regulate, and establish itself as the sole authority on fragrance safety, simply does not serve the public health interest."*

Researchers have looked at the chemicals released by dryer sheets and fabric softeners. A study published in 2011 found over 25 different **air pollutants**, including

those known to cause cancer, such as benzene and acetaldehyde.<sup>9</sup> Some of the chemicals commonly found in these laundry products include:<sup>10</sup>

**Benzyl acetate** — Linked to pancreatic cancer

**Benzyl alcohol** — An upper respiratory irritant

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**Ethanol** — Causes central nervous system (CNS) problems, is on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) hazardous waste list

**A-terpineol** — Triggers respiratory difficulties, and CNS harm

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**Ethyl acetate** — On the EPA's hazardous waste list

**Camphor** — Triggers CNS conditions

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**Chloroform** — Carcinogenic, anesthetic and neurotoxic

**Linalool** — Narcotic that causes CNS damage

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**Pentane** — Harmful when inhaled

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## How to Get Rid of Static Cling

Fabric softeners work by leaving a residue on your fabrics that never really completely washes out. More natural options are safer, less expensive and less toxic to your family and the environment.

More static cling occurs during the winter months as humidity in the air helps to reduce the number of charged protons and electrons. You can use this information to help reduce static cling in your home.

By spritzing a little water on your clothing or rubbing moisturizer over your skin you can dispel the static immediately. Try also spritzing your clothes with distilled water when they are removed from the dryer to prevent static when you wear the clothes.

Keeping a humidifier in your laundry room may help reduce static cling in your clothing as they are removed from the dryer. If your clothing has a static charge, slip the clothing over a metal hanger to discharge the unbalanced protons and electrons, and reduce or eliminate the static cling.

Hold the hanger with a towel if you are passing many pieces of clothing through the hanger, and wipe it with water between every two or three pieces so it continues to discharge the electrons.

You may also try removing your clothes from the dryer before they have dried completely. The extra moisture in the clothing will help to reduce the static, and you'll reduce your electric usage. Wooden drying racks or hanging your clothes will help them to finish drying quickly.

## **Sensible Alternatives for Your Washer and Dryer**

If you don't want to hang dry your clothes, or are looking for a more natural way of discharging the static using your dryer, you may try using paper clips on the hems of your garments in the dryer to discharge the static. Alternatively, crumple a ball of aluminum foil and add it to the dryer.

Use moisture inside your dryer to discharge the static by adding a moist towel in the last 10 minutes of the drying cycle. If the dryer finishes before you add the towel, add the towel and dry on the lowest setting for another 10 minutes.

Launder your natural and synthetic fabrics separately since nylon and rayon fabrics develop the most static electricity. There are several ways of making your own fabric softener or dryer sheets at home with natural ingredients, and still enjoy a fresh scent on your clothing.

Combine 6 cups of white vinegar, 1 cup of baking soda and 15 to 20 drops of essential oil in the scent of your choice in a large bowl.<sup>11</sup>

Once the combination has stopped foaming the oil should not be floating on the top of the liquid and won't stain your clothes. Pour the liquid into a glass container and use up to 1 cup in your fabric softener dispenser in your washing machine with each load.

You can also make your own fabric softener crystals at home by combining essential oils of your choice with [Epsom salts](#) in a glass jar.<sup>12</sup> Once you've made the crystals, combine them with 1 cup of baking soda and 6 cups of white vinegar in a glass jar. Add the vinegar slowly. This liquid will separate, so shake each time before pouring out half a cup for your laundry.

If you prefer dryer sheets, or want to use both, use the same fluid to make reusable sheets.<sup>13</sup> Simply soak clean washrags in the fluid and wring out the excess. Next hang the washrags until they are completely dry. Toss one in the dryer with your clothes; use up to 10 times before you have to get a new one.

## **Your Clothes Contribute to Chemical Sensitivity**

The prevalence of people suffering from chemical sensitivities is higher than you think. Two national surveys found nearly 16% of the population experience multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS). Your risk of MCS increases if you suffer from asthma.<sup>14</sup> People with MCS experience migraines, seizures, asthma attacks and even lose consciousness.

Unfortunately, these symptoms can be so profound that some people are unable to function. According to the Guide to Less Toxic Products by the Environmental Health Association of Nova Scotia, your fabric softener contains quaternary ammonium compounds,<sup>15</sup> or "quat," and imidazolidinyl. Both of these compounds release [formaldehyde](#) with use.<sup>16</sup>

Formaldehyde is a known carcinogen that can damage your DNA and trigger abnormal cell growth.<sup>17</sup> It can also trigger joint pain, depression, chronic pain, headaches and a variety of other symptoms. Approximately 5% of people are so sensitive to quats that the chemical triggers asthma-like symptoms and even respiratory arrest.

Chemicals in fabric softeners also include coal-tar dyes, ammonia and a chemical mix of very strong fragrances. Each of these chemicals are derived from petroleum products, which are highly toxic to humans.

## Fun Static Cling Experiment

If you're at a loss as to how to explain static electricity to your children, it will be fun to do some simple experiments with them at home. This experiment is by Science Made Simple:<sup>18</sup>

### Light a Light Bulb with a Balloon Using Static Electricity

#### NEED:

- Plastic or hard rubber comb
- Balloon
- Dark room
- Fluorescent light bulb (do not use an incandescent bulb)

**SAFETY NOTE:** DO NOT use electricity from a wall outlet! Handle glass bulbs with care to avoid breaking the glass. Wrap the bulb in transparent tape to reduce the chance of getting cut if it does break.

**EXPERIMENT:** Move into a dark room. Charge the comb or balloon with your hair, sweater or the carpet. Be sure to build up a lot of charge. Touch the area of the comb or balloon you were rubbing against the light bulb. You'll see small sparks in the bulb. After recharging the balloon or comb, try moving it to different parts of the light bulb to see what happens.

## Sources and References

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