

Picture this:

You've just spent the day four-wheel driving the dunes, hiking the track, or swimming with the kids. You're ready to crash early and get a good night's sleep, but... it doesn't quite work out that way.

Sometime in the night, you wake to feel the ground firmly beneath you, and -
Pssssssss...

There's that tell-tale sound. Your air mattress has sprung a leak. Don't feel deflated - this blog details how to repair and care for a [camp mattress](#) when things fall flat on those full-blown outdoor adventures!

Don't feel deflated - this blog details how to repair and care for a camp mattress. Image: Exped

Watch our YouTube video for Lauren's step-by-step guide:

Repairing a Mattress

Repairing a leaky [airbed](#) or [self-inflating mattress](#) is not as daunting as some may think, and it's the same straightforward process for both. Most airbeds or self-inflating mattresses come complete with a repair kit. If this is ever misplaced, [spares](#) are also available.

The Gear Required:

- Existing repair kit (included with your mattress), or a replacement most suited to your needs, or any kit listed in Step 8.
- Spray bottle
- Standard dishwashing liquid
- Water
- Paper towel
- Texta or permanent marker
- Scissors



Step 1

Inflate the Mattress and Spray it Down

First, inflate the mattress fully so that the air behind the leak is under more pressure to escape. Create a solution in your spray bottle of a squeeze of dishwashing liquid and some water.

Start by spraying down the mat, beginning at the base. This part of the mat was touching the ground, so that's where the puncture is most likely to be.



Step 2

Locate the Puncture

Work systematically, spraying down the entire mattress and watching for any bubbles – these are created by the escaping air. If you have access to a bath, you could also submerge your mattress into soapy bathwater.

If you know exactly where the leak is, you can bypass these first two steps.



Step 3

Mark the Area

'X' marks the spot. Use some paper towel to dry off the area, then the marker to clearly mark the spot to not lose sight of where the leak is.



Step 4

Prepare Your Patch and Deflate

Ideally, cut your patch to the size of a 50-cent coin to achieve a decent amount of coverage around the damaged area. You could also get away with something the size of a 20-cent coin. Round off your patch and trim away any corner pieces that may get caught and rip off your patch.

Deflate your airbed or mattress as much as possible. If you attempt to repair an inflated mattress, there will be air attempting to force its way out of the puncture. This will compromise the repair job.

Thoroughly dry off the area with paper towel too.



Step 5

Apply the Adhesive

Apply the adhesive to the hole, and spread generously around the area to comfortably accommodate the patch.



Step 6

Allow Adhesive to Become Tacky

Leave for a minute or so to allow the glue to become tacky. If you have ever repaired a bike tube before, you'll know exactly what this means.



Step 7

Apply the Patch

Stick on the patch and hold it in place for a minute or so, ensuring it is flat and bedded firmly in the glue. Apply a little pressure so the edges are sealed.

Note: We recommend cutting a larger patch than what is displayed in the images, with rounded corners (the patch used in the image above is for demonstration purposes only). As mentioned, a circular patch about the size of a 50-cent piece is ideal. The patches you'll find in your repair kit are likely to be much more neutral to blend in with the rest of the mattress.



Step 8

Test!

It's best to allow 8-10 hours of drying time before you reinflate your mattress, so that the glue and patch have properly sealed around the leak. This ensures a long-lasting repair. You may be cranky in the morning after that sleepless night - but if you get onto the repair job early enough, the patch can do its thing throughout the day so your mattress is good to go again that night.

If the puncture is more of a tear, run a bead of Seam Grip along its length and allow it to dry thoroughly.

Here are some helpful replacement repair kits, if what's included with your mattress has gone MIA!

- Elemental Air Mattress Repair Kit - a generic repair kit specifically designed for air mattresses. Includes both a vinyl and velour fabric patch.
- Thermarest Permanent Home Repair Kit - perfect for Thermarest mats but can also be used on other self-inflating mattresses.
- Sea to Summit Sleeping Mat Repair Kit - Designed for Sea to Summit mats with Air Sprung Cells™ technology.
- Gear Aid Field Repair Kit - a multi-purpose repair kit that can be used on all kinds of fabric so long as it's not silicone treated.
- Gear Aid Seam Grip + WP Sealer & Adhesive - an essential part of any camper's kit, this stuff is a multi-purpose adhesive that'll get you out of a bind every time.



There are a few points to remember when using and storing your self-inflating mattress.

Image: Exped

Caring for a Self-Inflating Mattress

Here are a few important things to remember when using and storing your self-inflating



mattress.

If you've deflated a self-inflating mat, rolled it up, and packed away – you may find that when the time comes to retrieve it from its bag on your next camping trip, it doesn't want to self-inflate. This is because it has been stored deflated for too long.

Inspect the Area

Survey the area where you plan to sleep on your mattress, and remove any small rocks, stones, grass seeds, or anything else sharp enough to puncture it.

This goes for packing away, too – ensure your mat is clean of any small rocks and seeds prior to rolling it up and packing into its bag. A small stone or grass seed could puncture it while packed.

Carry a Mattress Patch Kit

See above for how to best repair a puncture.



Survey the area where you plan to sleep on your mattress. Image: Geordie Wright

Storing Your Mat

Dry

Ensure your mat is as dry as possible prior to rolling it up and packing away. Doing so could mean it sweats, creating mould on both the mat and the inside of its bag. This causes it to smell and potentially become a health hazard.

Unrolled

When you arrive home from your trip, remove your mat from its bag, unroll it, allow it to self-inflate, and ensure it's clean.

Clean

Wash or wipe over with a damp cloth, and allow it to properly dry.



Ensure your mat is as dry as possible prior to rolling it up and packing away. Image: Exped

Inflated

...in a cool, dark, and dry place. Given it's fully inflated, ensure it is touching nothing that might puncture it.

Ideal storage places are:

- A shelf or under a bed (lying flat)
- Behind a couch (standing on its side)
- In a cupboard or behind a closed door (standing on its end)
- Hung up (if the mattress has straps)

Keep the Air Valve Open

Keeping the air valve of the mattress open when in storage will allow the mattress to expand and contract. This allows any moisture inside the mattress to gradually dry out too.

If your mattress is not stored fully inflated, the foam or cells inside may crush. As a result, it may become ineffective the next time it's in use. This is because they may not expand to allow air in through the valve.

 *Providing that your mattress is looked after properly, it will suffice for many years! Image: Exped*

If your self-inflating mattress doesn't inflate...

If at any point this happens, you can blow in a few puffs of air yourself for added firmness. These mattresses are not designed to be inflated with an air compressor or other types of inflators.

Providing that your mattress is looked after properly, it will suffice for many years. Next time you head out camping, you'll be thankful to have stored and looked after your mattress well!
Experienced a few leaky air beds in your time? Got any tips to add to this 'how to'?