

The last thing you'll be thinking about when you're in the middle of a 14-day trip is how you look (or smell) but maintaining good hygiene when on the trail or at the campsite is not just about looks, it's also important for your health.

Leaving no trace behind should be the most important consideration when heading into a pristine environment, and that includes your personal hygiene practices. If you need a refresh of the 7 Leave No Trace Principles, then check out this guide [here](#).

In this article, we're going to take you through the essentials you'll need, what you should avoid doing, what options you have for showering, washing your hands and cleaning your clothes while you're in the middle of your adventure.

Ensure you have the right gear with you to keep clean and leave no trace.

Essential products for personal hygiene:

1. [Hand sanitiser](#)
2. [Biodegradable phosphate-free wash](#)
3. [Compostable wipes](#) (though you will need to take them home to dispose of them)
4. [Portable clothesline](#)
5. Washcloth
6. [Microfibre towel](#)
7. Ziploc bags for packing out used wipes
8. Toothpaste
9. Toothbrush
10. Floss
11. [Washbag](#)
12. [Squeezable water bottle](#)

What to avoid:

- Personal care products that are not biodegradable
- Heavily scented products, as this can attract bugs
- Soaps or washes that contain phosphates
- Bulky products that produce waste

Here are some of the essentials you could bring to keep clean when outdoors.

Brushing your teeth

While brushing your teeth is a pretty straightforward activity, there are a few things to consider when you're out on the trail.

If you don't mind carrying the extra weight, a toothbrush shield helps to keep it clean. Try using a smaller amount of biodegradable toothpaste than you usually would, swish your mouth with a small amount of water and spray it over a wider area, so it's not concentrated in one spot and minimises the impact on the environment.

Or alternatively, you can spit the residue into a hole that you've dug.

Washing your hands

Hand sanitiser is going to be your best friend when out on the trail as you won't always have ready access to soap and water to wash your hands.

When you're amongst a group of people, germs can spread pretty quickly which is why it's essential to sanitise your hands every time single time you go to the toilet or prepare food.



Wash your hands or use sanitiser to keep germs from spreading. Image: Sea to Summit

How do you bathe when hiking or trekking?

To maintain good hygiene when away from the comfort of a running shower, there are a couple of different options you can do on a lightweight adventure.

While it is tempting to skip the wipe or wash after a long day out and about, keeping clean will help keep your clothes and bedding in better condition as the oil, dirt and sweat won't get on your mat, sleeping bag or pillow. Trust us, your down sleeping bag will thank you for it as you won't have to wash it as often.

1. Use a portable pocket-sized shower

If you're happy to carry the extra weight, there's the option of a Pocket Shower which is a more luxurious option when you're travelling light.

This is essentially a dry sack with a shower head built into the base that can be adjusted by a twist mechanism. All you do is fill with water, put out in the sun to warm up, and then hang up which provides an 8 and a half minute shower. Then once you're done, you can dry off with a compact microfibre towel.

This option probably isn't going to be suitable for every trip, but on a particularly warm and sweaty adventure, you might appreciate washing off with this portable shower.



If you can spare the space and weight, a pocket shower is an option for keeping clean.

Image: Sea to Summit

2. Take a sponge bath

Firstly, if you're going to be attempting any sort of shower even if it's just with a washcloth and water, you'll need to be at least 60 metres (200 feet) from any water source in the area. Heat up some water and pour it into a portable sink, add in some biodegradable body wash, grab a washcloth and get started. Once you've finished, make sure you dispose of the water 60 metres from a water source. A squeezy water bottle comes in handy here as you'll be able to rinse those hard to reach areas.



*A washcloth, portable sink and biodegradable wash is another option for staying fresh.
Image: Sea to Summit*

3. Use wipes

Wipes are great when you either can't spare the water, or you're just plain too tired after a long day to attempt anything else.

You want wipes that will remove salt, sweat and oils from your body, so depending on your preference you might want to try unscented baby wipes, or something a bit thicker like Wilderness Wipes from Sea to Summit.

Even though you won't be burying them, consider a compostable option for when you get home and need to dispose of them.



When you're really exhausted, or water is limited, wipes will get the job done.

4. Wash off in a lake or river

If you are going to wash directly in a lake or river, don't use any soap *at all* even if its biodegradable. Also, if you've smothered yourself in sunscreen and insect repellent, this will wash off into the water and can also cause contamination, so it might be best to collect water to wash with and then scatter it instead. Keep in mind that other people might be using the river to collect drinking water from, so consider that before you jump in.

While we all kind of know that phosphates aren't great for the environment, but what you might not know is why. Phosphates increase algae growth, which decreases oxygen in the water making it harder for fish and other aquatic life to survive.

So, when you're choosing a biodegradable soap to use (not in a lake or river, of course) when camping or hiking, choose one that is also phosphate free.



If you bathe in a river or lake, be considerate of the environment. Image: Sea to Summit

Washing your clothes when hiking

On a lightweight trip, you're not going to be carrying a whole wardrobe of clothes. You'll likely have a couple of pairs of socks, underwear, and a spare set of clothes that you'll rotate. A great way to get your clothes clean, that doesn't use a lot of water is a Scrubba Wash Bag. This is essentially a portable mini washing bag. You just add a couple of garments,



biodegradable washing detergent and water, push out the excess air, seal it up, agitate for 3 mins, rinse and dry – and your clothes are ready to wear again.

You could also use your dry bag to wash your clothes or a portable sink – as both will get the job done in a similar way and are multi-purpose to save on weight. When you're all done, just make sure that you scatter the greywater the correct distance away from water sources.



Fresh clothes will help you maintain good hygiene on the trail.

Feminine hygiene - dealing with your period when hiking

For all the ladies reading this, you've got a couple of options here. The most efficient and environmentally friendly choice is a menstrual cup. Keep in mind that your hands need to be very clean when using and emptying it. You should also dispose of the contents of the cup like you would when going to the toilet.

Secondly, you could use standard disposable feminine hygiene products, just make sure you have a way to carry them out with you – a Ziploc bag is usually best for this. You can also cover it with duct tape for more discretion.

Make up a little kit with all your hygiene products in it, that way it's easy to locate in your rucksack with minimal stress in the critical moment.



Keep everything you need in one bag, so that it's ready to use.

Keeping your feet clean and dry

Making sure your feet are dry and clean before you change your socks will help to prevent any nasty bacteria from breeding. It's also a good idea to dry out your boots at night, just make sure that if they're leather you don't leave them out for long in the sun as they can shrink!

Maintaining good personal hygiene that doesn't leave any trace behind is super important for your health, and for the environment. We hope these tips have pointed you in the right direction, so that next time you head away you can keep it clean, and keep it green.

How do you keep clean on your lightweight adventures?