



Real rugged outdoorsmen and women see nature's bath as a lake, its shower as rainfall, and its toilet simply as a hole in the ground. There are many ways to lather the suds off the grid and maintain good hygiene beyond the bathroom – and doing so on the trail or at the campsite is not just about maintaining appearances, it's also important for 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 the guide on our [blog](#).

In this article, we unpack the essentials for a rustic cleanse, the cleaning methods to avoid, and options for showering, handwashing, tasteful toileting, and outdoor laundry.

Let's upgrade from the gum leaves, and keep it clean 'n classy...



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

Personal Hygiene Essentials:

- Hand sanitiser
- [Biodegradable wash](#)
- [Compostable wipes](#) (burn or dispose of these properly at camp. Never bury, flush, or drop wipes into a pit loo)
- [Portable clothesline](#)
- Washcloth
- [Microfibre towel](#)
- Ziploc bags (for packing out used wipes)
- Toothpaste (biodegradable)
- Toothbrush
- Floss
- [Washbag](#)
- [Squeezable water bottle](#)
- Trowel or mini shovel (for toileting)

Avoid:

- Personal care products that are not biodegradable
- Heavily scented products (these can attract bugs)
- Soaps or washes containing phosphates
- Bulky products that produce waste

You may know that phosphates aren't great for the environment, but you may not know why. Phosphates increase algae growth, which decreases oxygen in the water – making it harder



for fish and other aquatic life to survive.

So, when choosing a biodegradable soap for camping or hiking, choose phosphate-free too.

Your toiletries bag may also include:

- A small container or spray bottle of water
- Baby powder (great in humidity and keeps chafing at bay!)
- Sanitiser (a glovebox staple – useful to save an upset stomach, or worse!)
- A large S-hook (for instant hanging space, wherever you may need it)
- Thongs (you'll want them on your feet, no matter where you're showering)
- Toothbrush shield (see below)



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

Brushing Your Teeth

While this 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. Teeth are also best cleaned at your campsite and using water you know is 100% bacteria-free. 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 – this minimises the impact on the environment).

Alternatively, spit the residue into a hole you've dug.

Handwashing

Hand sanitiser will be your best friend out on the trail, as you won't always have access to soap and water.

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



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

Bathing When Hiking or Trekking

To maintain good hygiene when away from the comfort of a running shower, there are a couple of options for 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, preventing oil, dirt, and sweat from rubbing into 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!



Portable Showers

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

This is essentially a dry sack with a shower head built into the base which can be adjusted via a twist mechanism. Simply fill with water, warm it up in the sun, and hang it up for an 8.5-minute shower! Once you're done, dry off with a compact microfibre towel.

There is a range of camp showers available to make cleaning a comfortable experience. Some even run on solar power or batteries, offering a hot water option. You can also simply use a small tub of water, soap, and washcloth.

A few things to note:

- Wash 100-200m from any watercourses (this includes dry creek beds), as soaps and shampoos can be damaging to aquatic wildlife.
- Use biodegradable soaps with low sodium and phosphate, and avoid soaps and shampoos with fragrances.
- Chemicals in cleaning products can damage the surrounding bush, and scents might attract unwanted insects.

This option probably won't be suitable for every trip, but on a particularly warm and sweaty adventure you're likely to appreciate this method of washing away the day! For more on how to set up a camping shower, check out Ben's blog [here](#).



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

Image: Sea to Summit

Sponge Baths

While nothing beats a shower after a long day, this isn't always practical if you're hiking for a few days and don't have access to a lot of water or room in your pack to carry equipment.

Heat up some water, and pour it into a portable sink. Add some biodegradable body wash, grab a washcloth, and get started! When finished, ensure you dispose of the water 60-100m from a water source. A squeezy water bottle comes in handy here, as you'll be able to rinse those hard-to-reach areas.

Another technique to clean yourself is to use moistened cotton balls.

- Use them on your underarms, groin, face, feet, back of the neck, or other areas that are prone to sweat.
- These take up little room in your pack, and you'd be surprised how much grime cotton balls can remove!
- For additional antibacterial protection, dab the cotton balls in alcohol-based hand sanitiser. Be careful though, as excess use can dry the skin and sting if used on rashes and grazes.



A washcloth, portable sink and biodegradable wash is another option for staying fresh.

Image: Sea to Summit



Wipes

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

You want the sort that will remove salt, sweat, and oils from your body. Depending on your preference, you may want to try unscented baby wipes or something a little thicker like Sea to Summit's Wilderness Wipes.

You may not be burying them, but still consider a compostable option for when you arrive home and need to dispose of them.



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

Nature's Bath!

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 cause contamination. In this case, it might be best to collect water to wash with and scatter it afterwards instead. Other people might be using the river to collect drinking water from too, so consider that before you jump in!

If you are free camping too, consider the impact on the environment as well as your health and safety. Fresh or saltwater, if safe, is for unpolluting, cleansing, and refreshing dips. However, being swept away by the current, or becoming croc bait is not worth the risk... so know the water source and your environment before taking the plunge!

Drying Off

Just like a coffee order, towel selection is personal. Do you prefer large or small? Thick, or thin?

Many travellers like a compact, fast-drying microfibre range, car chamois, or sarong. Even a small and thin 100% cotton towel is sufficient, and doesn't take long to dry. On the other hand, a large towel is bulky and guaranteed to be packed wet or – at best – damp.

A few tips:

- If you are towing or packed high, with restricted vision out the back window, string a line across the seat behind. This can act as an airing rack, and your towel can dry as you drive.
- A large Chux can be used as a towel alternate. A cut piece makes a great, quick-drying face washer – and it's perfect to dry your toes really well before you pop them into your shoes!



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



Laundry

On a lightweight trip, you're not going to be carrying a whole wardrobe of clothes. Instead, you're likely to keep a couple of pairs of socks, underwear, and a spare set of clothes to rotate.

A great way to clean your clothes (that doesn't use a lot of water) is a Scrubba Wash Bag. This is essentially a portable mini washing bag – simply 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.

You could also use your dry bag, or a portable sink. Both will get the job done in a similar way, and are multi-purpose to save on weight. When you're finished, just ensure you scatter the greywater the safe and correct distance from water sources.

Sometimes, laundry isn't always practical. In these instances, air-dry your clothes after hiking each day. Wet or sweaty clothes stored in your pack can be a source of bacteria. You can also choose to wear clothes that wick away moisture so they dry much faster and don't become as sweaty. A lot of hiking clothing is designed specifically for this purpose.

A travel towel, like the Sea to Summit Drylite Towel, is also a great investment. Regular towels can stay wet for a long time and harbour bacteria, while a travel towel will air-dry in no time at all.



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

Going About Your Business...

Feminine Hygiene

For the females reading this, there are a couple of options for managing your monthly visitor on an off-grid getaway.

The most efficient and environmentally friendly choice is a menstrual cup. Keep in mind that your hands need to be clean when both using and emptying it. You should also dispose of the cup contents as you would when going to the toilet.

Secondly, use standard, disposable feminine hygiene products – but ensure you have a way to carry them out with you. A Ziploc bag is usually best for this, or covering it with duct tape for more discretion.

Put together a little kit of your hygiene products. That way, it's easy to locate in your rucksack with minimal stress in the critical moment!

Number 1's and 2's

There are a number of portable toilets, and even toilet tents, available for doing your business in private. These are useful if you're camping out in some of the coastal or desert country of Australia, where there aren't as many trees to squat behind!

If you don't have room to take a portable toilet, a few tips to consider when going to the toilet in the bush are:



- Always relieving yourself away from campsites, walking tracks, and any watercourses
- Digging a deep hole (at least 15-20 cm deep) and tapping down the soil afterwards with your boot or back of the trowel. The bacteria in human faeces can be harmful to native wildlife.
- Ensuring you bury both your deposit and the toilet paper but nothing that might contain chemicals or inorganic materials (such as plastic).
- Being mindful of toilet paper. There is nothing worse than seeing stray toilet paper floating in the bush – not to mention the associated hygiene issues!
- Digging holes – a lightweight trowel is important to include in your pack for this. Some soil can be quite compacted in Australia, so a trowel with a point allows you to dig deep enough.
- Taking a bottle of hand sanitiser. Often, people will wash their hands back at the campsite. By the time they've got back from doing their business, they've touched the trowel, door of the tent, and cap of the water bottle!



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

Ben and Lauren also discuss how to take care of business in the outdoors on the Snowys Camping Show:

Cooking and Eating

Before cooking and eating, clean your hands. When camping, you might be handling soil and animals. Quite often, the bacteria you come into contact with when camping is unfamiliar to your body. It's therefore even more vital to clean your hands before eating, than it is at home or work.

If you don't have access to warm running water, hand sanitiser is – once again – effective. Remember to wash your cutlery and dishes properly, rather than just a quick rinse. Ideally, heat up some water after you finish cooking, and – once again – dispose of the used dishwater away from any watercourses.

Rubbish

If there are no bins, you'll need to take your waste with you. If you have to carry waste, ensure it is stored away from food and other personal items. Ziplock bags are a great way to keep smells contained and prevent leakage.

A tip is to double-bag rubbish, then store it in an opaque bag (so you don't have to look at it!).

Keeping Feet Clean and Dry

Doing this 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 too long in the sun. They can shrink!

Other Squeaky Clean Tips:

- Invest in a pair of thongs, and a lightweight loose shift/shower dress or shorts that can be slipped on to and from the shower. It's no fun getting dressed when the floor is wet, or stepping into shower-splashed, damp, or wet clothes. Take no other clothes with you, and get dressed back at camp instead.
- Pop your toiletries and fresh clothing in a cloth supermarket bag. The extra space will fit your towel and any laundry you might like to do in the shower block. Hang it from its handles and you'll have less to juggle on an insufficient benchtop or shower stall seat.
- Invest in a good strong nail brush and keep your nails short.
- Apply appropriate first aid to any cuts and grazes.
- Again, in the great outdoors there are germs your body may not be used to – you don't want a wound becoming infected. Cover up wounds with a plaster or dressing, regardless of how insignificant it might seem.

Maintaining good personal hygiene that leaves no trace behind is super important for both your health and the environment. We hope these tips have pointed you in the right direction – so next time you head away, you can keep it clean and green!

Ben and Lauren also chat about keeping clean in the outdoors on the Snowys Camping Show. Check it out:

How do you keep clean on your lightweight adventures?