How to Clean Your Sewing Machine: Get Smoother Sewing & Fewer Repairs

How often to clean your machine depends on how often you use it. Janome most often recommends cleaning a machine after at least every 10 hours of use. But more often is fine. Take a peek inside the bobbin case. If you see lint beginning to accumulate, it's time to do some maintenance. Many quilters swear by the rule of cleaning the bobbin case after every two to three bobbin changes.

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Any time you experience trouble with your machine, try cleaning it. It's part of the Janome "testing trio" of things to try when there's an issue; 1) re-thread the needle and bobbin, 2) insert a new needle appropriate to the project, 3) clean the machine.

Quite a few problems are caused by an accumulation of dust, lint or thread bits on the working parts of the machine. After cleaning your machine, if it still is not working smoothly, have your machine checked by your local dealer. Continuing to sew when your machine is not functioning correctly can worsen a problem.

In the photos below, we're using the Janome Horizon Memory Craft 15000, proving that all machines, from entry-level to top-of-the-line, need attention on a regular basis. We appreciate the time and patience of the staff at Paramount Sewing & Vacuum in Eugene, Oregon for being our photo shoot location. You guys are great!

First things first: find your instruction manual
Your sewing machine's instruction manual is the best reference for your machine. You need it in order to properly maintain your specific machine. If you don't have one for your make and model, go to the manufacturer's website. Janome America offers a handy, all-in-one page where you can search for your model and download a copy of the manual. If you are unable to find anything online, contact the manufacturer and request one. Provide the machine name, model, and serial number if possible. Your local dealer may also be able to help you.

**Gather your tools**

**Standard items:**

2. Lint brush. Most machines come with a lint brush. If you don't have one, you can buy one at a fabric store or from your dealer. A small, clean makeup brush will do in a pinch.
3. Needles. Be sure you have a stock of new needles on hand. You should replace the needle each time you maintain your machine. We also recommend starting each new project with a new needle.
4. A soft cloth – muslin is a good choice.

**Optional items:**

1. Small-scale vacuum attachments are helpful in pulling lint out of hiding spots. You can buy them online or where vacuums are sold. The same attachment can be used to clean your computer keyboard.
2. Some people prefer to use canned air because it really blows the lint out. Canned air, however, can introduce moisture into your machine's interior. To avoid this, hold the nozzle at least 4” away. Spray so the air is at an angle to the parts
you are cleaning, and always blow lint OUT of the machine rather than into it. Never use your breath to blow lint from inside your machine. Your breath contains more moisture than canned air and, over time, can cause corrosion.

3. Another alternative to a lint brush is a camel hair artist's brush with long bristles that are rounded at the end — not trimmed straight across. The lint clings to the bristles for easy lint pick-up in those dark spaces under the bobbin case. Purchase a quality brush, not the cheap kind that come with children's painting supplies.

4. We’ve also heard of people who use tiny disposal mascara brushes, as well as pipe cleaners as their favorite cleaning tools.

**Give lint the brush off**

1. Unplug your machine.

2. Remove and discard the needle, noting the direction of flat side of the needle. Usually the flat side faces the back of the machine, however, the flat side is likely to face to the right on machines with side-loading bobbins.

3. Follow your instruction manual to remove the presser foot...

4. the bobbin...

5. and the needle plate and bobbin case.
6. Use your lint brush, canned air, or vacuum to remove lint and gunk from each of these pieces (see notes above about cautions and alternatives).

7. Your manual may also show how to remove the "race area" (where the bobbin case sits). If so, look carefully at it, because once it's off, you'll want to be sure it's very clear how to put it back together. If this is not 100% clear, skip this step. In most instances, race cleaning is a task best left to your dealer. We did not remove the race from our Janome MC15000. But, there was a ring magnet at the bottom of the bobbin race, which we did lift out to clean underneath.

8. Start by brushing the lint out of the feed dogs.
9. Then brush, vacuum or use your canned air to blow the lint collected in the race area and under the feed dogs. When using canned air, make sure you don't blow the lint farther into the machine. Blow back-to-front and right-to-left.

10. Reassemble the race (if you took it apart).

11. If your machine has a side cover, open that to clean out the thread path. If it doesn't have a side cover, blow air down through the thread paths. This will clean out the tension disks.

12. Another popular method to clean the tension discs is to raise your presser foot to disengage the discs, then run a length of thick cotton thread or dental floss back and forth through the thread channel a few times.

13. Clean the exterior of the machine with a soft cloth.
14. Plug in your machine and turn it on. Try running it without the needle, needle plate, presser foot, bobbin, and bobbin case for just a few seconds to be sure it is working smoothly.

15. Turn off the machine once again.

16. Replace the bobbin case (carefully lining up the case as directed in your manual), bobbin, needle plate, and presser foot.

17. Insert a new needle. Be sure the flat side is facing correctly.

**To lubricate or not to lubricate**

Once your machine is lint free, you can lubricate it with the clear oil recommended in your owner's manual. Do not use any other type of oil. Don't use WD-40 or other household oil.

Some newer machines DO NOT require lubrication at all. Refer to your manual.

If you have lubricated your machine with oil, when you're finished, leave a fabric remnant under the presser foot to soak up any oil left behind. Then, when you start your next project, there's no danger of an oily stain getting left behind on your new fabric with the first few stitches.

**Other good maintenance practices**

It takes only a few extra minutes to keep your machine running like a champ.

1. Dust, lint and pet hair quickly work their way into a machine that is left uncovered. Protect your machine between sewing projects by covering it or putting it inside a sewing cabinet or machine case. We have five pretty sewing machine cover tutorials:
2. Don't keep your machine in a dusty area – the kitty litter box should reside elsewhere.
3. Brush lint and dust from around the machine area each time it is used.
4. Change needles often. A bent or dull needle will not only damage your fabric, but your machine as well.
5. Be sure your hands are clean before using your sewing machine. A little peanut butter can make a big mess of your fabric and your machine. Don't ask me how I know that.
6. Have an authorized dealer do basic maintenance on your machine at least every two years, including cleaning, oiling, adjusting tension and a general test of working parts. Also have them stitch out a straight and zigzag seam to confirm tension.

Our thanks again to Janome America for helping us give you the information you need to keep your sewing machine running at its best. For more about Janome machines, accessories and projects, visit them online or follow them on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and Pinterest.

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