

Maintaining Your Camera

A good camera, like any other fine mechanical device, will work better if it is used regularly. Normal use keeps lubricants from stiffening and gumming up the works. If a camera has been lightly used or unused on over a long time, it would be surprising if it did not develop mechanical problems.

The most dreaded problem for a camera is droppage or other impact; however, dirt, heat, and moisture can be extremely damaging. Unless the camera is waterproof, it is best to protect it when using it in the rain or snow and to avoid rapid changes in temperature which can cause condensation.

If dirt, dust, sand, or moisture find their way into the camera's mechanisms, the camera may need to be repaired by a trained technician. If the camera does get wet on the outside, dry it with lint free materials as soon as possible. Also, remove as much surface dirt as possible with a cloth, brush or compressed air, before opening the camera to unload or change film. In the case of stubborn dirt, a cotton swab moistened in alcohol is a good cleaning tool.



Avoid leaving cameras and/or film in closed cars or other environments that get hot. Heat can ruin both exposed and unexposed film and may cause the lubricants in the camera and lenses to melt and spread onto surfaces where lubricants were unintended. Lubricant coated optics cause blurry images.

Never leave a camera in a sealed container in the sun. Condensation inside the container may form and the moisture can harm the camera and fog lenses. If rust forms on interior mechanisms the camera could fail without warning.

Use a soft brush or compressed air to remove the dirt and residue build-up inside the camera's film compartment. Be extremely careful to avoid touching or blowing compressed air on the very fragile shutter mechanisms when cleaning inside the camera.

Check the camera's strap and strap lanyards from time to time. If the strap is old and frayed, replace it. If the strap lanyards are loose, tighten them. A strap disconnecting at the wrong moment can cause the camera to fall.



Keep camera optics clean. Dirt, dust and fingerprints on lenses will cause degradation in image quality.

Lenses can be cleaned with special lens tissues or with any soft, absorbent, lint-free cloth. Anything safe to use on eyeglasses will be fine on photographic optics. Do not use facial tissues on any coated or uncoated optical glass surfaces. Facial tissues are soft on skin but are not lint free and, if used repeatedly, may scratch the coating or glass of a lens.

Never attempt to clean the mirrored surfaces or any other elements of the internal camera focusing system. Dust, dirt and even fingerprints on the mirror, will not depreciate the quality of photographic images, but attempts to clean the surfaces may harm delicate front-surface reflectors and make future focusing more difficult.



This information refers to film, digital, and video imaging equipment. Some extra guidelines for digital equipment include being careful with memory and keeping LCD panels clean. Refer to the article about X-rays and scanning for memory protection. Cleaning the LCD can be accomplished with the same lint-free cloth used on the lenses.