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Coffee Machine Care: Cleaning and Descaling

A maintenance plan for espresso and bean-to-cup machines, moka pots, French presses and grinders

Limescale and built-up coffee oils are the most common causes of bitter coffee, weak pressure and breakdowns. Regular maintenance takes a few minutes a week and extends the life of your machine by years. The manufacturer's manual for your appliance always takes priority; this plan is general.

Maintenance plan

Task	Espresso machine (portafilter)	Bean-to-cup machine
Flush the group head (brewing unit) with water	after every use	done by the machine itself
Wipe and purge the steam wand	after every milk frothing	after every milk frothing
Empty the drip tray and grounds container	daily	daily
Change the water in the tank	daily	daily
Clean the portafilter and baskets	rinse daily, soak in cleaner weekly	–
Backflush with a blind basket and cleaning agent	once a week (only machines with a 3-way valve)	–
Rinse the removable brewing unit	–	once a week in lukewarm water without detergent
Cleaning tablet (degreasing)	–	when the machine prompts, roughly once a month
Clean the milk system	wand daily	flush daily, cleaner once a week
Descale	depending on water hardness, see below	when the machine prompts
Replace the water filter	as per manufacturer, usually after 2 months	as per manufacturer, usually after 2 months or 50 l
Check the group head gasket	replace roughly every 6–12 months	–

How often to descale

Water hardness	°dH (German degrees)	Descaling (guide)
soft	up to 7	every 3 months
medium hard	7–14	every 2 months
hard	over 14	every month

You can find your water hardness on your water supplier's website or with a test strip, which often comes with the coffee machine. If you use a water filter, the interval gets longer.

Descaling step by step

1. Remove the water filter from the tank, as the descaler would ruin it.
2. Prepare the descaling solution exactly as instructed on the product packaging.
3. Bean-to-cup machine: start the descaling programme and follow the display.
4. Espresso machine: run the solution in portions through the group head and the steam wand, leaving it to act for 5–10 minutes between portions.
5. Rinse the tank and flush the machine with at least two full tanks of clean water.
6. Put the filter back and make a first coffee, which you pour away.

Use a descaler designed for coffee machines. Vinegar can damage seals and leave an odour, and many manufacturers explicitly advise against it. Switch the machine off and let it cool down before cleaning; the steam wand and group head can be very hot. Wash parts in the dishwasher only if the manufacturer allows it.

Moka pot, French press and filter

- Take the moka pot apart after every use, rinse it with warm water and leave it disassembled to dry. Do not put an aluminium pot in the dishwasher. Replace the gasket and filter plate roughly once a year.
- Unscrew the French press and wash the mesh and plunger, otherwise oils build up in them and the coffee turns rancid.
- Glass carafes and drippers can be descaled with a citric acid solution, then rinse thoroughly.

Coffee grinder

- Clean coffee residue from the burrs or blades with a brush every 2–4 weeks.
- Do not use water on the burrs unless the manufacturer allows it. Cleaning granules designed for grinders will help.
- Grinding oily, dark-roasted coffee clogs the grinder faster, so clean it more often.

This plan is general. Intervals and procedures differ between machines, and the manufacturer's manual always takes precedence. Failure to maintain the machine may affect the warranty.
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