

HELPFUL HINTS

Caring For Jewelry—What You Need To Know

(NAPSA)—Jewelry is an intimate and cherished accessory. An elegant pair of pearl and platinum earrings, for example, makes an individual statement, nestled against the skin and resplendent in lustrous light.

Yet, according to experts at the nonprofit Gemological Institute of America (GIA), chemicals found in everyday substances like hair-spray, lotions, perfumes, or other cosmetics can permanently damage the nacre of your dazzling pearl, and can corrode the alloys in that shiny setting. Understanding how to care for your treasured jewelry can make a world of difference in maintaining its beauty and keeping its heirloom quality sparkling for generations to come.

GIA says that light and heat can affect a colored gemstone's durability and color. Just as the sun's harmful rays can damage our skin, over time and in excess, it can also fade and weaken some gemstones, such as amethyst, kunzite, topaz, and pink conch-shell cameos.

Pearls and other delicate materials, like ivory, will bleach under extreme exposure to light. Other gems, especially amber, can darken over time when exposed to too much light.

Excessive heat and sudden temperature changes may also fracture the gem. Heat can easily remove the natural moisture some gems need to keep their beauty. Pearls can dry out, crack and discolor. Opals will turn white or brown, develop tiny cracks, and might lose their play-of-color.



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Exposure to chemicals can damage and discolor precious metals—gold, silver, and platinum—and may harm some colored gems. Fine jewelry should be removed before diving into a chlorinated swimming pool, or before using household cleaners. Many of these cleaners contain ammonia, and are only safe for diamonds and the more durable colored gems. Chlorine bleach, another common household solvent, can pit gold alloys.

GIA recommends cleaning most colored gems with warm water, mild soap (no detergents), and a soft brush. A pulsed-water dental cleaning appliance and a soft, lint-free cloth can also be used. Be sure to stop the sink's drain or use a rubber mat in case the stone comes loose from its setting.

Soft gems, such as pearls, on the other hand, can easily be

scratched. GIA suggests using an unused makeup brush instead, and warm, soapy water. Lay the pearls on a towel to dry. The wet string can stretch—and attract dirt—so don't touch a string of pearls until they are completely dry. Pearls worn every few days should be restrung once a year.

Proper jewelry storage is often overlooked. Jewelry should never be tossed into a drawer or on top of a dresser—that's a recipe for scratches and fractured gems. Most jewelry pieces come in a box or pouch from the store, which is a perfect place to keep them. Sterling silver, for example, should be kept in an anti-tarnish bag or cloth.

Jewelry boxes that feature individually padded slots for rings, and posts for hanging necklaces and bracelets, are also ideal. Like pearls, opals draw moisture from the air. Storing your opal ring or pearl earrings in a dry area, such as a safety deposit box, can actually do more harm than good. When traveling with jewelry, protect the pieces from scratches or other impact damage by padding the jewelry.

Many jewelry stores offer free check-ups or professional cleanings at scheduled intervals (once a year is common). GIA recommends consulting a professionally qualified jeweler, such as a Graduate Gemologist, Graduate Jeweler, or Accredited Jewelry Professional. For more information about gems and jewelry, and GIA's internationally acclaimed education, visit www.gia.edu, or call 800-421-7250.