

Sleeping System

For the best possible rest, put together a sleeping system keyed to the temperatures and weather conditions you expect to experience.

Sleeping Bag

The cloth part of a sleeping bag is called the *shell*. The shells of most modern sleeping bags are made of nylon. Some use a breathable fabric that fends off mist and light rain. *Fill material* inside the shell traps your body heat and holds it close to you. Choices of fill materials are *goose down* and *synthetic fibers*.

Goose Down

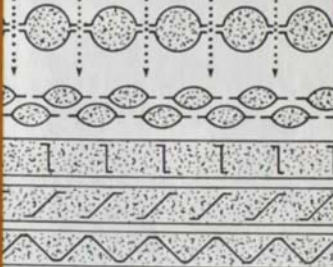
Down is the fluffy feathers geese grow next to their skins. It provides the most warmth for the least weight of any fill material used in sleeping bags and insulated clothing. Its major drawbacks are its expense and the fact that

it loses its loft and can no longer keep you warm when it becomes wet. Although down must be sheltered from the elements, usually with a good tent, it can be the best choice for cold-weather camping in relatively dry conditions and for treks requiring very light gear.

Synthetic Fibers

Synthetic fill is made of polyester fibers spun in various ways to provide warmth-trapping loft even when wet. The disadvantages of some synthetic-filled bags are their weight and bulk.

The key to camping comfort is to carry a good sleeping bag that will help you keep warm at night but not become a burden to carry during the day.



Simple quilting. Loses heat where the stitching passes through the fabric.

Double quilting. Two quilts fastened together in an offset way to eliminate cold spots. Material tends to be heavy.

Box wall. Prevents the filling from moving about.

Slant wall. Prevents down from moving about and gives it room to expand.

Overlapping tube or V-baffle. Very effective, but because it uses a lot of material, it tends to be heavy.

Packing and Caring for Your Sleeping Bag

Stow your sleeping bag in a stuff sack lined with a plastic trash bag. That will protect your sleeping bag even in bad storms or the capsizing of a kayak, canoe, or raft.

Air out your sleeping bag at the end of a trip. Keep it in a large cloth laundry sack or hang it in a dry, out-of-the-way spot until your next adventure. Don't store a sleeping bag in its stuff sack; fill that is compressed for a long time loses some of its loft and insulating capacity.

With ordinary use, a sleeping bag should not need to be cleaned very often. If it has become excessively soiled or has lost a good deal of its loft, though, you might be able to restore it by laundering. per the manufacturer's directions. Some bags can be laundered using a mild, fragrance-free detergent, and washing the bag in cold water in a commercial-sized washing machine. Run the rinse cycle a second time to remove any soap residue. A wet bag is heavy and prone to damage; support its full weight as you move it from the washer to a drier. Dry it on the coolest setting and expect the drying process to take from two to five hours.



Sleeping Bag Comfort Ratings

Manufacturers often assign a *comfort rating* to a new sleeping bag—an estimate of the lowest temperature that bag is designed to address. People differ in the amount of insulation they need to stay warm, so use comfort ratings as a general, rather than absolute, guide. Sleeping inside a tent can enhance a sleeping bag's insulating power. A *fleece bag liner* can add another 10 degrees to the warmth of a bag and help keep it clean.

Bags shaped to be snug against your body tend to be warmer than looser bags. Added features, such as collars, hoods with drawstrings, and tubes of fill material backing the zippers, will further slow the loss of body heat.

Sleeping Pad

What you have beneath you at night is as important in keeping you warm and dry as what's on top. A *sleeping pad* will prevent the cold ground from drawing away body heat, and gives you a comfortable surface on which to sleep. Your best choices are *foam pads* and *self-inflating pads*.

Foam Pad

Foam pads vary in the degree of insulation and comfort they provide. *Closed-cell* foam pads tend to be effective at preventing heat loss, but at the expense of comfort. *Open-cell* foam pads are softer, but might not be as warm or as durable. Though lightweight, bulky foam pads can be challenging to stow in a pack.

Self-Inflating Pad

The choice of many outdoor travelers, a *self-inflating* sleeping pad is an airtight nylon shell covering open-cell foam. It provides maximum insulation and warmth. Self-inflating pads often are more expensive and heavier than other kinds of pads, and they should be accompanied by a small repair kit for patching punctures.

Unroll your sleeping bag early on dry days so it can fluff up as much as possible. In humid or rainy weather, however, leave the bag in its stuff sack until bedtime so it won't absorb moisture from the air.

Using Your Sleeping System

Just as you wear layers of clothing that can be adjusted to meet changing weather conditions, you can set up your sleeping system for night temperatures any time of the year. Start with a good general-use sleeping bag and leave the zipper open on warm evenings. If the night is cold, zip the bag to your chin and pull the hood snugly around your head. For more warmth, put on long underwear, a stocking hat, dry socks, and mittens. Add a fleece sweater or jacket, too, or wrap it around your hips and thighs.

Make a pillow in any weather by arranging some extra clothing (in bear country, clean clothing only) in a stuff sack or inside a sweater with the sleeves tied together.

Cross Section of the Sleeping System

