

## *How to Care for Video Tapes*

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I know we have entered the digital age where people are no longer shooting videos on video tape. However, the medium is still around and probably will be around for a while longer. Bearing that in mind, I found and edited an article that I wrote in the mid 1990's and published it here for you.

I have compiled a short list of tips that you could use easily to make your precious videos last much longer.

1. **TREAT THEM GENTLY!** Please do not throw or drop videocassettes onto anything. Even a soft surface can damage the tape and mechanism inside. It will show up as poor tracking, wrinkles on the tape, or dropout. Tracking can be corrected to an extent with a tracking control found on most VCR's. This fix will only last for a while because repeatedly dropping the tape will cause this problem to become more prevalent. Dropout is where the video and/or audio signal "drops out" and partially disappears from the video tape. All of these will exhibit nasty lines and picture breakup during playback. This problem is not fixable with conventional machines, and will not go away.
2. **STORE THEM COMFORTABLY!** The tapes need to be stored in a place that is not too hot and not too cold. A good range is between fifty and eighty degrees Fahrenheit. A medium humidity of between forty and sixty percent is also best. A good gauge is that if you are comfortable, then your tapes will also be fine. You should avoid damp or cold basements or other moisture prone places. Also do not leave them by a window exposed to sunlight, or in your car.
3. **NO MAGNETIC FIELDS!** Magnetic fields are causes for dropout and erasures. Here is a list of places to avoid: TV's, speakers, motors, air conditioners or the like. Aluminum foil or other such materials do not shield from magnetic fields.
4. **KEEP THEM CLEAN!** Avoid dust, dirt, smoke, food and drinks, and anything that will lead to problems.
5. **DO NOT TOUCH!** Do not open the cassette or touch the tape itself. It is very sensitive, and your fingers will damage the tape.
6. **PUT IT AWAY!** Do not leave the cassette in your machine. By doing so, the machine will be in pause or standby modes, and these put extra strain on the tape. This stretches the tape and wears it out.
7. **EXERCISE THE TAPES!** Once each year you should either, play your cassettes to the end and then rewind them, or at least fast-forward and then rewind them, from one end to the other. This will prevent the possibility of the tape sticking to itself. A re-winder can save wear and tear on the motor in your machine.
8. **LET THEM STAND.** Tapes should best be stored in a vertical position on the short side. The full reel should be stored on the bottom. Do not stack them flat, and do not move them around more than necessary.

9. ARCHIVE. To archive your tapes, seal them in plastic, and if the humidity is high, then place a bag of calcium chloride desiccant inside the bag to absorb moisture.
10. CLEAN YOUR VCR. You should have the heads of your VCR professionally cleaned on a regular basis. We recommend you do this at least once a year depending on usage. Although there are several methods available, most maintenance professionals feel that these cause more damage to the machine.
11. If you have a small cassette (like VHS-C), do not use the adapters to make it fit inside of a normal size VCR. Better to copy the tape onto a full size videotape and use that.
12. ERASE TAB. To prevent accidental erasures, you should break the record tab on the cassette.
13. STORAGE. Always store the cassette in the sleeve or box in which it came.
14. VIEWING. Proper viewing distance is four times the height of the monitor (not necessarily six feet).
15. SPEED. Please only use the SP speed (2 hour mode). The slower speeds tend to put more wear and tear on the VCR and will cause it to wear out sooner. Although the machines and tapes say they can do up to six hours, in reality, they are not made for this. It is much better to use the standard speeds for playing and recording.

**With good care, your tapes will last you a long time, and you will have many hours of enjoyable watching.**