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The Guide to the Modern Clothes Dryer | Certified Appliance

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Here's everything you ever wanted to know about clothes dryers! Learn about the history of these appliances, along with maintenance tips and common problems.

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**The Guide to the Modern Clothes Dryer**

Putting on warm clothes fresh from the dryer is one of life's undisputed little pleasures. We all love our clothes dryers, so it's essential to make sure we're taking proper care of them.

Our guide below covers the most important things you need to know about this vital appliance. Learning more about how your dryer works will help you use it efficiently, maintain it to prevent common problems, and budget for [dryer repairs](#) when necessary.

How Does a Clothes Dryer Work?

Clothes dryers use a combination of three principles to remove moisture from wet clothing:

- **Airflow:** a blower wheel near the front or back of the dryer brings air into the drum and circulates it while the drum is turning.
- **Rotation:** a drive belt rotates the dryer's drum, causing ridges (or baffles) inside to lift and toss the contents into the air. Moving the load in such a way ensures that it is exposed to heat and air evenly.
- **Heat:** an electric element (on most modern dryers) heats the air as the blower wheel pushes it into the drum. The hotter the air circulating through the drum, the faster the contents will dry.

How Are Modern Clothes Dryers Different from Legacy Models?

Clothes dryers have been around for a long time, but they haven't always used the same technology as modern versions. Early clothes dryers were just drums with air holes that people turned over an open flame with a hand crank. We think that process would be pretty rough on your delicates — singed silk, anyone?

American inventor George T. Sampson [patented the first clothes dryer in 1892](#), but his version merely switched out the open flame for a stove and included a rack. Clothes dryers as we know them today didn't start to appear until the late 1930s. Modern touches — such as permanent press cycles and electronic timing controls — emerged in the 1960s and 1970s.

Since then, the most significant innovations to clothes dryers have involved improvements to capacity and energy efficiency. Modern dryers with ENERGY STAR certification can use [up to 20% less energy](#) than legacy models without compromising performance or features.

How Should You Maintain Your Dryer?

Maintaining a clothes dryer isn't difficult — it just requires you to be diligent about following a few routine steps:

- Clean the lint filter every time you dry a load of clothes. While you're at it, use a lint brush to clean the trap where the filter sits (since lint can build up there as well).
- Once every three months, wash the lint filter with a small amount of detergent and rinse it off with water. Washing your lint screen will get rid of built-up residue from dryer sheets.
- Use a microfibre cloth and some rubbing alcohol to clean the drum's interior once every few loads. Rubbing down this surface will remove any dryer sheet residue that has collected there.
- Remove lint from the exhaust vent at the back of the dryer once every two years. Less lint is likely to collect in this part of the machine, but it still happens over time. If you notice that your exhaust vent is made of flammable vinyl, consider replacing it with a metal one.
- Make sure there is enough space around the machine for the blower wheel to circulate air properly. If the dryer is too close to walls or other objects, the blower wheel won't move enough warm air from the heating element, which can confuse the unit's internal thermostat.
- Ensure the vent cap that runs outside your home is clear of debris by checking it every few weeks and removing snow, twigs, or other materials that have accumulated nearby.
- Don't overload the dryer when you run it. The drum should only ever be two-thirds full if you want to operate the machine efficiently. Fill it any more than that, and your clothes might not even dry entirely by the time the machine stops! Remember: the clothes need room to move as the drum rotates so that warm air can reach them evenly.

5 Common Dryer Problems

We've fixed many clothes dryers in Calgary, but we see some problems more often than others. Here are 5 of the most frequent issues we deal with:

- **Damaged thermostat:** a dryer placed too close to the wall can't move enough air from the heating element to the space inside the drum. As a result, the thermostat near the element heats up and switches off power to the element, preventing it from producing heat. You'll end up with a dryer that takes too long to finish each load, and a thermostat that breaks from switching on and off too often in rapid succession.
- **Damaged thermal fuse:** low airflow can also cause the thermal fuses on your dryer's blower housing to fail. If they do, your dryer may refuse to start. Additionally, thermal fuses may fail when the lint screen is clogged, or the machine is overloaded.
- **Broken heating element:** lousy ventilation, an excess of lint, or a machine that is overloaded too often can also cause the heating element to fail. If it does, the dryer might seem to run, but your clothes will probably stay damp.
- **Failed drum seal:** overloading the machine all the time can put pressure on the drum seal in your dryer, eventually causing it to break. You'll know the seal has weakened if your dryer vibrates excessively while running or makes abnormal sounds. Hitting the dryer or bumping it against something too hard can also damage the drum seal.
- **Frayed power cord:** sometimes, a dryer won't turn on at all, and the owner panics. However, in many cases, this is simply due to a frayed power cord. Dryer power cords are more likely to fray than those of other appliances since dryers move when they are running and are often kept in basements or garages (where pests are more likely to live).

Almost all common dryer problems (except for frayed cords) are caused by three factors: poor ventilation, overloading, and lint buildup over time. Use the maintenance tips above to prevent these problems and call for professional help if they have already occurred.

Dryer Maintenance Protects Your Investment

Clothes dryers are wonders of modern technology, but they require care and maintenance if you want them to work correctly. Make your dryer last by using what you've learned here to keep it in optimal condition, and enjoy dryer-fresh laundry for many years to come.