

How to Dress for The Collapse

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 **COLLAPSE SURVIVAL SITE**



HOW TO DRESS FOR THE COLLAPSE

There is historical precedent for how disasters affect the clothing choices of any population. World War I and World War II changed the way people thought how they dressed, not only for practical reasons but for emotional reasons as well. For the first time, women started to wear pants on a regular basis as they filled the roles of men in the work force.

The Great Depression of the 1930's forced a radical change in clothing as fashion was replaced by durability and functionality. People also had to think about wearing and living with a smaller wardrobe as the cost of clothing had to be balanced with essential needs like food.

It's hard to imagine the desperation of a depression or another world war, but economic collapse is an ever-present possibility, and a [failure of the power grid](#) for any number of reasons could lead to a radical and sudden shift in day-to-day life.

And then there's the increasing threat of natural disasters, an on-going war in Eastern Europe, and the potential for new pandemics devastating the supply chain. That's when everything changes, but the one thing we won't be able to change all that often is clothing, so it's time to take some lessons from the past as we ponder an uncertain future.

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Clothing 101

It seems silly to analyze what we wear, but when it comes to assessing the best choices for clothing in difficult and demanding times, it's worth a moment of reflection. Stop and take a look at the clothing you and your family have in your

closets.

We'll cover ideal characteristics, but first: *stop throwing clothes away*. If no one is wearing something anymore, store it. There may come a time where a little repair or a simple [barter transaction](#) can add new value to those old clothes.

There's another factor to consider as well. We usually think of clothing as something to protect us from the elements whether it's heat, cold, rain, or snow. In an uncertain future where the grid may be down, some of us may find we're wearing the same clothes indoors and outdoors.

If you've ever camped in winter, you may have slept in a coat and hat. In summer, you may have spent the day in gym shorts and a T-shirt. [Without air-conditioning](#), that could become your indoor wardrobe as well.

The point is, clothing won't be as much a fashion statement as a survival statement, and the most critical characteristics will be defined by 3 qualities:

1. **Practicality**
2. **Utility**
3. **Durability**

Practicality

Practicality in clothing is driven by cost and fabrics. Cotton is historically cheapest, wool costs more, and some synthetic fabrics can be the most expensive. Many of us have heard the expression, "Cotton kills" as a clothing choice for winter, but there's nothing wrong with wearing cotton in winter if you can avoid getting it wet from precipitation or perspiration.

It's impractical to have an entire wardrobe of wool or synthetic clothes, and your budget will have much to do with your clothing choices. Regardless of what you choose, a

practical approach would dictate a variety of clothes made from cotton, wool, and synthetics with the next characteristic in mind.

Utility

If it's cold, you dress warm. If it's hot you dress light. Utility aligns clothing with the elements and time of year. But there's more to it. Multiple pockets in pants, shirts, and jackets may be a good idea when times are challenging and your general shopping options are limited.

If the grid is down, good luck finding a lot of stores for everyday items. If you need something, you'll have to take it with you, and cargo pants with many large pockets become a better idea. The same goes for pants and shirts.

Shoes and boots are another consideration in times and places where a single pair of shoes will have to handle varying conditions. Pacs or shoes/boots with a rubberized bottom and sides and breathable leather at the ankles make sense across a range of weather and terrain, from puddles in city streets to mud in forests and fields.

Utility means an item of clothing can provide a range of functions, satisfy a variety of needs, and work across sudden and varying weather conditions.



Durability

When Levi Strauss put rivets in his denim jeans at the height of the California Gold Rush in 1849, the miner's bought them like they were the only clothing on Earth. What Strauss figured out is that tough, reliable durability could be brought to clothing with simple innovation and design.

Across fabrics from cotton to wool and synthetics, various materials demonstrate durability to varying degrees. Denim may be one of the most durable cotton examples, and Carhartt has taken durability in denim to another level across a variety of pants, overalls, jackets and coats.

Leather and hides from other animals are another highly durable fabric and the [Shearling jackets](#) worn by World War II bomber pilots are still popular to this day. They're made from the tanned hides of sheep with the fleece still attached to make them not only durable but warm and resistant to moisture.

What defines durability is the thickness of the fabric, its natural strength, the quality and integrity of any stitching, and in some unique cases, the addition of things like rivets or linings to reinforce areas under high stress and wear.

Fabric Science

Cotton

Cotton is a plant based fabric that is best worn in Spring, Summer, and Fall. Whether short sleeve shirts or shorts, cotton is the fabric choice for anyone living close to the equator or during the summer in northern latitudes.

The downside of cotton is that it is highly absorbent and any precipitation or perspiration will wick and hold into cotton making it an unforgiving fabric in cold weather. On the upside, it is relatively inexpensive and fairly durable.

Wool

Wool is a traditional choice for winter and many people wear it in summer, although some people can't stand the itching and scratching of wool on hot days. As an animal fabric, it is highly effective at both holding in body heat and protecting from the outside cold.

Its durability depends a lot on the design and stitching, but if put together well or still attached to the hide, it is one of the most durable fabrics. Prices are usually higher than cotton items.

Silk

Silk is surprisingly strong and a first choice for hot weather. It actually feels cool on the skin even on the hottest days, but it's delicate and must be washed and dried carefully. It's also expensive.

Synthetic Fabrics

These emerged in the 20th century and the most well-known may be [Gortex](#). The advantage of synthetic fabrics is that many of them are water-resistant but still breathable so rain is kept out and perspiration is not kept in.

Prices for synthetics vary widely depending on the type of clothing and the quality of manufacture.

Hybrid Fabrics

These are created through fabric combinations or unique weaving practices. Flannel is a good example and can be made from cotton, wool or synthetics. The fabric that flannel is made from ultimately defines its characteristics.

The fabrics you choose are driven by your budget, but you should at least consider cotton or wool. They're less expensive than silk, synthetics, and hybrids.

And Then There's The "Gray Man"



You may have heard of the expression, “Be [the gray man](#).” It simply means don’t stand out, and keep a low profile. The idea is to not draw attention to yourself in times of civil unrest or societal collapse.

Curiously, an instinct of some people in desperate times is to wear clothing that falls in the category of tactical gear. This includes camos, tactical vests, military boots, and other gear that makes you look military and ready for action. Contrary to popular belief, it does little to deter people and may actually make you a target.

As we go through various items of clothing in our survival closet, we’ll encourage neutral colors that satisfy all of the criteria of durability, utility, and practicality without making a military “fashion” statement.

How Much Clothing is Enough?

That depends on your situation.

If you're traveling, travel light. Socks and underwear are light and you should have multiple pairs. The same goes for pants. The concept is that as you go up on the body from your feet you should have more extra clothing because the lower parts of your body are more exposed to the elements; brush, splattered mud, and debris and need to be changed or washed more often.

If you're home or in a permanent location, stock up. The plan is to assemble clothing that lasts and satisfies a variety of functions and seasons. The reality is that new clothes may be hard to find or very expensive, so you should think about the long-term with a wardrobe that will last longer.

And stop throwing away those old clothes. Store them the same way you would stockpile food or gear. If things are at their worst, simple purchases like clothing or at least clothing in your size may be difficult if not impossible.

Clothing Repair

We're quick to buy a new shirt when we lose a button or turn an old pair of jeans into rags when they're ripped. However, when the price or availability of clothing gets out of reach, it would be wise to have the ability to repair them.

It also makes sense to have the basic skills so the repairs are not only reliable but don't make you look like a scarecrow. Here are some items to think about storing:

- [Buttons](#) in a variety of colors and sizes (they're cheap)
- [Thread](#) in a range of colors and strengths
- [Sewing needles](#) including larger needles for sewing denim

and leather

- [A sewing machine](#)
- [Bolts of fabric](#) for patching, repairs, or sewing new clothes from scratch
- [Collection of clothing patterns](#) if you think you might want to sew your own
- [Shoe laces](#) in a variety of sizes and materials (also fairly inexpensive)
- [Lengths of elastic](#) in various sizes and strengths
- [Various zippers](#)
- [Rivets and snaps](#) and the tools to attach them
- [Good scissors](#) designed for fabrics
- [Thimbles](#), [pin cushions](#) and other items that help you sew and repair
- [Shoe repair tools](#) plus soles, leather, lace eyelets
- [A book](#) or two about sewing and repairing clothing, shoes and boots

If you can't buy it for any reason, you have to repair it. That's a lot easier if you have the basic skills and stuff on hand to make that happen.

About The Kids...

Kids grow fast and grow out of clothing. If you have more than one child, hand-me-downs become an obvious choice.

There's some advice out there that you should buy clothing a little larger for any child to allow them to grow into them. That works better for shirts than pants.

Shoes are a different story. Shoes should fit from day one. Hand-me-down shoes remain an option.

The New Weather Challenge

Because of our changing climate, weather extremes will become more commonplace. Complicating matters is that a potential breakdown of basic services like electricity makes air-conditioning a thing of the past. There's also that matter of a winter without central heat.

Clothing will make a big difference for anyone trying to [stay cool in summer](#) and [warm in winter](#). We'll cover past and present clothing habits of people who live in both northern and southern latitudes.

Remember the Layers

Layers of clothing make sense any time of year. Layering allows you to take off a layer of clothes as the weather warms or as your physical activity raises your body temperature. It also allows you to add layers when the weather cools and in the event of rain, add a rain coat and pants as an outer shell.

Start with Your Closet

You may already have much of what you may need. Start by doing an assessment of what you already wear and try to determine:

- Which items can be repaired if needed
- Which would someday need to be replaced (buy them now)
- Which items have proven their value and should be bought in multiples for the future
- Which items you may be missing

It's not about the latest fashions; it's about the smartest choices. Take the time to think a bit about how prepared you are for a clothing shortage.

The Survival Closet

Let's get dressed, starting from the bottom up. We're going to begin with boots and shoes and identify their Ideal characteristics and do the same for all clothing items.

Shoes and Boots

Proper fit is the most important aspect for shoes and especially for boots. This is critical if you are walking distances on a regular basis and many of us will be quite active in desperate times.

Boots should fit snugly around the heel, ankle, and instep but have room for you to wiggle your toes. It's also important that your toes do not jam against the toe box when you press your foot forward. The best test of toe space is to stand on a downward incline for a while.

In the category of boots, work boots and hiking boots are designed to be rugged, durable, and are a practical consideration. The shoes or boots you choose are up to you but keep the following qualities in mind.



Ideal Characteristics:

- Proper stability and support for the foot
- Protection from foot injuries
- Adequate shock-absorption and comfort
- Prolonged wear and retention of shoe/boot shape
- A metal toe cap for boots if you think you'll be doing any construction, demolition or building
- Durable construction from leather or well stitched fabric

Insulated boots are a good idea for winter but if you have to stick with one pair of boots go with an un-insulated boot and wear two pairs of socks in winter.

Socks

If you could only pick one pair of socks, [choose wool](#). They won't be as hot in summer as you think and they are the first choice for winter. Fortunately, socks are cheap compared to

other clothing so stock up on stockings.

Cotton socks are fine for most of the year but make sure you have wool socks in the drawer as well. In case you're wondering, here are the best characteristics to look for in socks:

Cotton Socks

Advantages:

- Soft
- Easy to clean
- Affordable

Disadvantages:

- Retain moisture when feet perspire. This can leave the feet feeling clammy, which can lead to foot blisters and infections.
- Cotton socks also tend to lose their shape and stretch when wet.

Wool Socks

Advantages:

- Provide warmth during cold-weather exercise
- Retain heat when wet
- Can be blended with manufactured fibers to keep feet dry and provide insulation

Disadvantages:

- Retains moisture
- Long drying time

Pants

Pants take a beating. If you've ever done any construction or projects around the house, it's your pants that usually tell the tale. Denim pants are a good bet, but go for a quality brand if you can.

Cargo pants are another option. They have numerous pockets that come in handy if you spend a lot of time on foot or are engaged in a variety of projects and destinations. They can look a bit tactical, so stay away from the camos and khakis.

Most pants are cotton, but you can find wool pants and you'll need them if you live in a Northern latitude where cold weather is always a challenge. People who live close to the equator live in light, cotton pants that are usually white or at least a light color. That's a good choice when the air-conditioner's out.

Storm pants or bush pants are another consideration. They're waterproof and can sometimes be worn over a regular pair of pants. They'll keep you dry walking through wet brush and scrub. Snow pants are another possibility if winters are cold and snowy. Most are insulated and can also be worn over regular pants or jeans.

Here's what to look for:

Ideal Characteristics:

- Work any zippers before buying. It's the primary failure point on pants.
- Check the stitching. It should be even and consistent with no loose threads.
- Consider the fabric weave. Is it a consistent pattern?
- Assess the strength by stretching.
- All you have to do now is make sure they fit

Underpants

There's not a lot of rocket science here. They come in either briefs or boxers for men and briefs or panties for women. Durability and comfort seem to be the most important characteristics. They're also relatively inexpensive and very forgiving when repaired or sewn (few people will ever see them). Here's some common sense recommendations.

Ideal Characteristics:

- Comfortable fit
- Non-abrasive
- Ideally cotton

Shirts

Think long sleeve, short sleeve, cotton, and wool, and maybe treat yourself to a silk shirt or two if you live in a southern latitude where heat is a constant companion or can't stand the thought of life without air-conditioning.

Pockets make a lot of sense and some shirts fall in the category of cargo shirts with pockets everywhere for everything. Your only challenge will be looking like Colombo as you search your pockets for the car keys... assuming there's still affordable gas.

Some shirts are vented and designed to keep you cool in hot weather. Other shirts are insulated and usually flannel and work well in winter. Here's what to think about.

Ideal Characteristics:

- Cotton in summer, wool in winter
- At least one pocket
- Light colors in summer, dark colors in winter

- Durable fabrics like flannel weaves

Undershirts

There are all sorts of fancy permutations on undershirts these days. Typically they're cotton or an elastic polyester. It may be wise to go for different colors in case it gets hot and you have to spend the rest of the day in your undershirt.

At least you won't look like you're walking around in your underwear although lighter colors are best. Here's the lowdown on undershirts.

Ideal Characteristics:

- Loose fit
- Cotton fabric
- Range of colors

Bras

A sports bra is worth considering as an everyday undergarment. They're flexible and comfortable for anyone living an active lifestyle. Considering some of the challenges that may come following a societal collapse or catastrophic disaster it may be safe to assume that we'll all be very active. Here's the word on bras.

Ideal Characteristics:

- Consider sports bras
- Check the stitching on straps (main failure point)
- Overall comfort and support for active lifestyle

Gloves

They're not just for winter. Difficult times call for self-reliance and you may be very active doing everything from large-scale gardening to construction to wild foraging. Gardening gloves and nitrile gloves are inexpensive and it's worth having a dozen pairs of each.

Winter gloves are another story not only for their higher cost but all it takes is a burning ember from a fire to ruin a pair of gloves. Think about having at least two pair on hand if you live in a particularly cold area and remember that most anything can be repaired. Here's the lowdown on gloves:

Ideal Characteristics:

- Proper fit is critical
- Breathable fabric in summer
- Insulated for winter and water proof
- Wrist closures for winter
- Check finger flexibility for various and on-going tasks and chores
- Check overall thickness, finish, barrier protection, tensile strength, elasticity and puncture resistance



Hats

Hats protect us from the cold but also shade us from the sun. A wool stocking cap is a good bet but a fur lined bomber hat is worth having.

At a minimum, a few cotton stocking caps will help keep you warm especially if your jacket or coat has a hood.

Wide brim hats that protect your face, ears and neck from the sun are a must have if you spend any amount of time outdoors gardening, hunting, fishing or just getting from one place to another.

Wear a baseball cap if you must but [a surprising amount of melanomas](#) show up on the ears and neck. A societal collapse is a bad time to be looking for an oncologist let alone a dermatologist. Choose your hats wisely.

Here's some more hat wisdom:

Ideal Characteristics:

- Proper fit
- Full brim sun hats for summer
- Flexible adjustments over ears and neck for winter
- Wool or lined with animal fur (bomber hat style) for winter
- Moisture wicking features
- Packable
- Water repellent or water resistant

Jackets and Coats

Jackets and coats get us through the worst of weather. Think of them as investments because you may be using them for a long time. Your location and the local weather are important factors to consider but you may be traveling to areas with different weather patterns, so think ahead.

Ideal Characteristics:

- Think about a loose fit for layering under the jacket or coat
- Breathable
- Detachable hood for multi-season use across fall to winter to spring
- Waterproof and windproof
- Consider Down for winter jackets
- A Down vest is a good idea for layering in winter
- Sweatshirts with hoods (hoodies) are a great idea for layering in winter and chilly summer nights
- A winter parka is a wise investment especially if you live in a northern latitude

Bandanas

There are [hundreds of uses for a bandana](#). They're inexpensive and can be useful to everyone in the family. Stock up.

A Last Word on Laundry

It makes sense to buy clothes that are easily washed without a lot of fuss. It may be the only downside of wool (it easily shrinks). You also may be [doing your laundry by hand](#). Make sure you have sufficient detergent and bleach stored or you'll have to [make your own soap](#) if times get really tough.

Does This All Sound Too Extreme?

It always does when you think about the effects of disaster. But in many ways we're seeing some extreme events occurring right now. [Inflation and interest rates](#) keep rising, the [supply chain](#) is still a mess, [climate change](#) may be here to stay, and [that virus hasn't quit](#) even though many people just seem to accept it now. And that's an interesting behavior.

It doesn't take an apocalypse for things to deteriorate. But for some reason we learn to live with the worst and sometimes forget that things may not improve but only get much, much worse. That's a good reason for thinking about fundamental preparations.

In that regard, clothing certainly is a necessary part of our daily lives and survival, so maybe it's time to take another look at that closet, and ponder the potential for life after the collapse.

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