

TURNTABLE

MAINTENANCE GUIDE

Initial checklist (after buying used) and monthly maintenance checklist

Printable document — check off the boxes as you go

A well-maintained turntable delivers better sound quality, protects your records, and significantly extends the life of your cartridge. A few simple, regular habits are enough to avoid most of the problems found on both vintage and modern turntables.

Visual markers used in this guide: ☐ step to check off ✓ good practice ⚠ important precaution ✗ never do this



Figure 1 — Simplified anatomy of a vinyl turntable

1 ESSENTIAL TOOLS

Tool	Main use	Special precaution
Carbon fiber brush (e.g. AT6017 type)	Dusting the record before each play (anti-static)	Sweep in the direction of the groove, without pressing
Stylus brush with very fine bristles	Dusting the stylus tip	Movement from back to front only
Stylus cleaning gel (type Onzow Zerodust)	Removing residue stuck to the stylus	A single vertical press, never rub
Electronic contact cleaner spray (type DeoxIT, or equivalent)	Cleaning and protecting electrical connectors (cartridge headshell, RCA)	Always spray onto a cloth, never directly onto the component
Lint-free microfibre cloth	Platter, dust cover, mat, arm tube	Use dry or very slightly damp
Fine-tip cotton swabs	Targeted application of product on tonearm contacts	Never use on the stylus
Diluted isopropyl alcohol, electronics grade	Degreasing the platter spindle, metal contacts, and drive surfaces (motor pulley, belt or idler wheel)	Never on the stylus, cantilever, or its suspension
x10 magnifier or USB microscope	Visual inspection of stylus condition	Use before any liquid cleaning
Stylus force gauge (tracking force scale)	Checking the tracking force	Check after any cartridge reinstallation
Air blower bulb	Contact-free dusting of the tonearm and platter	Avoid canned air too close up (risk of frost)
Anti-static inner sleeves	Protecting records after playback	Choose a lined type, without hard PVC

2 INITIAL CHECKLIST — AFTER BUYING USED

To be done once, before the first extended listening session on a turntable bought used.

A. General visual inspection

- ☐ Check for visible damage on the platter, the tonearm, and the counterweight
- ☐ Check the condition of the belt (belt-drive turntables) — *look for cracks, stretching, loss of elasticity, shiny patches*
- ☐ Inspect the stylus with a magnifier (x10 minimum): wear, breakage, stuck residue

B. Cleaning the platter

- ☐ Remove the mat and wash it separately if the material allows — *adapt the cleaning method to the material: felt, cork, leather, acrylic, graphite*
- ☐ For a felt mat: check with the manufacturer before washing with water — *some lower-end felt mats can become misshapen*
- ☐ Let the mat dry completely flat before reassembly
- ☐ Clean the platter with a slightly damp microfibre cloth — *+ mild cleaner, never abrasive*
- ☐ Degrease the central spindle with a cotton swab + diluted isopropyl alcohol
- ☐ Only re-lubricate the bearing if the manufacturer recommends it, with an oil designed for turntables — *never WD40, motor oil, or lithium grease*

C. Cleaning the tonearm and its connectors

- ☐ Wipe the arm tube with a dry microfibre cloth (no solvent)
- ☐ Clean the pins of the cartridge headshell with contact cleaner, using a cotton swab
- ☐ Treat the rear RCA connectors and the ground wire with contact cleaner — *a product formulated for gold-plated contacts if applicable*
- ☐ Dust off the counterweight and check that the anti-skating moves freely
- ☐ Let it dry for 5 to 10 minutes before switching the power back on

D. Safe stylus cleaning

- ☐ Dry dusting with a stylus brush, back-to-front movement only
- ☐ If residue persists: a single vertical press on cleaning gel, without rubbing
- ☐ As a last resort, and only if the cartridge manufacturer allows it: a drop of dedicated fluid, with a brush reserved for this use
- ☐ Never touch the tip with your fingers, and never use a sideways or circular motion

E. Additional checks

- ☐ Set the tracking force with a stylus force gauge
- ☐ Check the anti-skating setting
- ☐ Check the cartridge alignment (azimuth, overhang) — *especially after replacing a cartridge*
- ☐ Check the rotation speed at 33 and 45 rpm — *also 78 rpm if the turntable supports it*
- ☐ Clean the dust cover with an anti-static product suited to plastic — *a special acrylic/plexiglass product if the cover is acrylic, to avoid micro-scratches*
- ☐ Check the feet and the anti-vibration suspension

F. Putting it away after use

- ✓ Replace the stylus guard after each use
- ✓ Lock the tonearm onto its rest
- ✓ Close the dust cover
- ✓ Avoid direct sunlight exposure
- ✓ Keep the turntable away from heat sources (radiators, amplifiers that run hot)

3 MONTHLY CHECKLIST — REGULAR MAINTENANCE

Routine to follow once a month for everyday use of the turntable.

- ☐ Dust the platter and dust cover with a dry microfibre cloth
- ☐ Dry-brush the stylus before every listening session — *a systematic habit, not just a monthly one*
- ☐ Apply the stylus cleaning gel once a month, or if a deposit is visible
- ☐ Inspect the stylus with a magnifier to detect abnormal wear
- ☐ Clean the platter mat (record vacuum or carbon fiber brush)
- ☐ Check the tracking force and anti-skating
- ☐ Treat the RCA connectors with contact cleaner only if crackling or dropouts occur — *don't make it routine — overly frequent use wears down the gold plating*
- ☐ Repeat the put-away routine (stylus guard, arm locked, dust cover closed) — *see chapter 2.F*

4 CARING FOR YOUR VINYL RECORDS

A stylus doesn't get dirty on its own: it picks up the dust and residue left by records. The two maintenance routines are inseparable.

- ☐ Brush each record with the carbon fiber brush (carbon microfibers) right before playing, following the groove direction
- ☐ Handle records only by the edges and the centre label — *never touch the groove with your fingers*
- ☐ Store each record in an anti-static inner sleeve
- ☐ Store records upright, never flat or stacked — *risk of warping*
- ☐ Keep the collection away from heat and direct light
- ☐ Plan for an occasional wet wash (dedicated record-washing machine, or a manual method with deionized water + velvet brush) — *especially useful when buying a used record*

Worth remembering

- A dirty record dirties the stylus; a dirty stylus degrades the sound and can cause the tip to skip, which scratches the record
- Cleaning only one of the two only solves part of the problem

5 WHEN SHOULD YOU REPLACE THE STYLUS?

A diamond tip's lifespan depends heavily on maintenance, the tracking force applied, and the quality of the tip itself. The figures below are indicative.

Tip type	Indicative lifespan
Spherical / conical	300 to 500 hours of play
Elliptical	500 to 800 hours of play
MicroLine / Shibata / Line Contact	800 to 1000+ hours, depending on the manufacturer

Signs of wear to watch for

- ☐ Exaggerated sibilance or hissing on vocals
- ☐ Distortion, particularly toward the end of a side
- ☐ Loss of detail, dull treble
- ☐ Unusual crackling not related to the record's condition
- ☐ Visible wear facet on the tip under a magnifier

If in doubt

- Have the tip checked by a professional before continuing to use it
- A worn diamond tip can permanently damage your records

6 DETAILED PROTOCOL — TONEARM AND CONNECTORS

1. **Power off** — unplug the turntable before doing any work on the connectors.
2. **Dusting** — wipe the arm tube with a dry microfibre cloth, no solvent on the lacquer or finish.
3. **Headshell contacts** — lightly moisten a cotton swab with contact cleaner, gently rub each pin, then wipe off the excess with a dry cloth.
4. **RCA connectors and phono cable** — spray the product onto a cloth (never directly onto the connector), then rub the pins; use a product formulated for gold-plated contacts if applicable.
5. **Ground wire** — check the terminal for corrosion and clean it the same way if needed.
6. **Drying** — let it air-dry for 5 to 10 minutes before plugging the turntable back in.
7. **Final check** — check that the arm, counterweight, and anti-skating all move freely after cleaning.



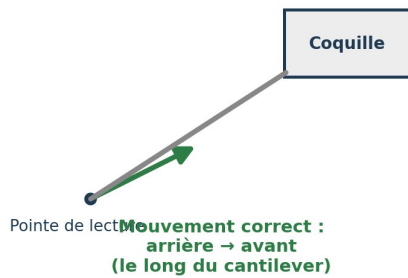
Precautions — tonearm and connectors

- Never spray cleaner directly onto an electronic component
- Never touch cleaned contacts with your fingers (skin oils)
- Do not use harsh solvents on the arm's lacquered finish
- Do not clean the contacts too often: excessive use wears down the gold plating

7 SAFE METHOD — CLEANING THE STYLUS

1. **Inspection** — look at the tip under a magnifier (x10 minimum) before any cleaning, to spot any breakage or compacted residue.
2. **Dry dusting** — brush with a very fine-bristled stylus brush, in a single motion from back to front (from the headshell toward the tip), never the other way and never sideways.

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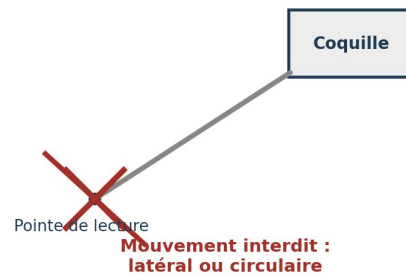


Figure 2 — Stylus cleaning direction: always back → front, never sideways

3. **Cleaning gel** — if residue persists, gently rest the tip on the gel (type Onzow Zerodust), apply a single vertical press, then lift off immediately without rubbing.
4. **Dedicated fluid (occasional)** — only if the cartridge manufacturer allows it — many high-end brands (Audio-Technica, Ortofon, Nagaoka, Lyra...) advise against using fluid on certain bonded diamond tips. If allowed: a single drop on a fine brush reserved exclusively for this use, back-to-front motion only; never dip the stylus.
5. **Frequency** — dry brushing every time you listen; gel or fluid once a month, or as soon as a deposit becomes visible.

⚠ Essential precautions — stylus and cantilever

- Never touch the stylus tip with your fingers
- Never use a sideways or circular motion (risk of bending or breaking the cantilever)
- Never use pure alcohol or harsh solvents (acetone, etc.): they attack the glue holding the stylus
- Never apply excessive downward pressure on the arm while cleaning
- Never clean a mounted stylus without first checking its condition under a magnifier

8 DIAGNOSTICS — RECOGNIZING A TURNTABLE THAT NEEDS MAINTENANCE

A quick first read before reaching for the toolbox.

Symptom	Likely cause	Recommended action
Hum (constant low-frequency noise)	Poorly connected ground, faulty RCA cable	Check the ground wire and RCA connectors
Unstable speed, wow & flutter	Loose or slipping belt, dirty pulley	Check/replace the belt, clean the pulley
Recurring crackling	Dirty stylus or dirty record	Clean the stylus and the record in question
Loss of one channel (only one side plays)	Oxidized RCA connector or headshell	Clean the electrical contacts
Arm returns poorly or drags	Anti-skating misadjusted, dirty pivot	Check the settings, dust off the pivot
Cartridge skips or catches	Insufficient tracking force, worn stylus	Check the tracking force, inspect the stylus
Visibly dirty diamond tip	Build-up of dust and residue	Immediate cleaning (brush then gel)
Loose or slipping belt	Belt wear	Replace the belt

9 MISTAKES TO AVOID

- ✗ Using pure alcohol directly on the stylus or cantilever
- ✗ Cleaning the stylus with sideways or circular motions
- ✗ Touching the stylus or freshly cleaned contacts with your fingers
- ✗ Spraying cleaner directly onto a component instead of onto a cloth
- ✗ Using household products (glass cleaner, degreaser) on the platter or dust cover
- ✗ Over-lubricating the platter spindle, or using an unsuitable lubricant (WD40, motor oil, grease)
- ✗ Cleaning the arm with harsh solvents that attack the lacquer or finish
- ✗ Cleaning the electrical contacts too often (premature wear of the gold plating)
- ✗ Using a fluid on the stylus without checking that the cartridge manufacturer allows it
- ✗ Putting the turntable away with the dust cover closed but the arm not locked
- ✗ Using a used turntable without first inspecting the stylus under a magnifier

10 FREQUENCY SUMMARY

Action	Recommended frequency
Brushing the record (carbon fiber brush)	Every time you listen
Dry brushing the stylus	Every time you listen
Full put-away routine (stylus guard, arm locked, dust cover closed)	After every listening session
Dusting the platter, dust cover, mat	Once a month
Stylus cleaning gel	Once a month, or if a deposit is visible
Inspecting the stylus with a magnifier	Once a month
Checking tracking force / anti-skating	Once a month, or after any disassembly
Contact cleaner on RCA / headshell	Only if crackling or dropouts occur (not routine)
Wet-washing records	Occasional, or when buying a used record
Full clean (platter + arm + stylus)	When buying a used turntable, then 1 to 2 times a year
Checking stylus wear	Depends on tip type (300 to 1000+ h) — see chapter 5