

ESPRESSO MACHINE MAINTENANCE

BY CHRISTOPHER SHORT

Given the growth over the past few years in the number of cafés across Australia and the quality of their coffee offerings, it is no surprise that many people want to replicate the café experience at home with their own espresso machine.

Selecting the right machine for your home is an important and often difficult decision. Having made your decision and purchased your brand new espresso machine you must spend a little time and energy maintaining it if you want to continue to making good coffee. Or you'll soon find yourself back at your favorite café with your machine pushed to the back of the cupboard.

Espresso machine maintenance is generally a simple process involving three simple steps.

1. Clean the coffee brewing system
2. Clean the milk frothing system, and
3. Descale the machine occasionally.

Let's look at each of them one at a time.

Cleaning the Coffee System

All espresso machines share the same basic approach to making coffee. They percolate hot water under pressure through tightly packed roasted ground coffee beans to extract the flavoursome and fragrant brew known as 'espresso coffee'.

This process leaves behind a 'cake' of used grounds that is easily disposed of. But some of these grounds will remain in the machine along with sticky coffee oils which will eventually block the filters and become rancid. The result will be bitter coffee lacking flavour and a steady reduction in the effectiveness and reliability of the machine.

The solution is simple – regularly clean the machine.



There are a number of terms used to describe the device in the machine that makes the liquid espresso – the 'coffee brewing unit', 'brewing head', 'brew unit', 'coffee dispenser' and 'infuser' – they are all the same thing. It is the coffee brewing unit that we need to clean.

With the variety of different espresso machines used in the home ranging from the simple to the sophisticated, it is not possible to provide the exact cleaning method for every machine.

But four different methods do exist depending on the type of brewing unit. These are:

Removable Brewing Unit – the brewing unit is designed to be removed from the machine for cleaning. Remove the brewing unit and place in the sink of warm water. Clean the unit of coffee oils and grounds, particularly the filters. Never place the coffee machine in the sink – only the removable brewing unit - and never clean the brewing unit in a dishwasher. Use sink dishwashing detergent and always rinse the unit thoroughly.

Fixed Brewing Unit with no Cleaning Cycle – the brewing unit cannot be removed and cannot be easily cleaned. This type of brewing unit is found in less expensive home machines and the

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instructions generally recommend activating the machine pump to flush the coffee residues after each use. Cino Cleano Espresso Machine Cleaning Solution will thoroughly clean the coffee oils from the machine. Simply add to the water tank and completely flush through the machine's coffee and milk systems. The water tank is then rinsed and refilled and flushed through the machine to rinse the machine before use.

Fixed Brewing Unit with a Cleaning Cycle – the brewing unit cannot be removed but the machine has a programmed cleaning cycle using Cino Cleano espresso machine cleaning tablets. To clean, activate the cleaning cycle and follow the display instructions. Never use dishwasher cleaning tablets. The use of incorrect cleaning tablets can corrode the machine, damage the brewing unit and leave chemical residue in the machine.

3-Way Valve Machines – this is the system used in the professional machines you will see in a café. Clean with Cino Cleano Espresso Machine Backflush powder. Place in a 'blind filter' within the group handle. The cleaning process in this type of machine allows for thorough cleaning and rinsing of the brewing unit.

Cleaning the Milk System

Just as there are different cleaning approaches for the four types of coffee brewing units, there are different cleaning approaches to the four types of milk frothing systems. Milk is a food very susceptible to bacterial spoilage and so great care should be taken to keep the milk system of the espresso machine in spotless condition, or you may get poor froth, bad tasting coffee or cause illness.

Steam or Milk Frothing Wand – a pipe coming from the machine used to manually froth milk by forcing steam through the milk. These are best cleaned externally by wiping thoroughly with a clean damp Cino Cleano Steam Wand cloth directly after use.

If the wand has not been cleaned and therefore has caked on milk deposits, soak the wand in a jug a solution of Cino Cleano Milk Frother & Sanitiser and hot water until the deposits are soft and wipe clean. Rinse the wand and dry with a Cino Cleano Steam Wand cloth.

Tip - never over-froth the milk by exhausting the machine's steam capacity since this can lead to milk being drawn back up into the machine.

Steam Wand and Froth Enhancer – froth enhancers are devices attached to the steam wand to help make richer froth when manually steaming milk. To clean the froth enhancer, remove and thoroughly clean in hot water ensuring all milk deposits are removed before replacing on the cleaned steam wand.

Internal Milk Frothing Units – these are devices that cannot readily be removed from the espresso machine for cleaning. After you have finished making coffees, flush the milk frothing unit with Cino Cleano Milk Frother Cleaner & Sanitiser and then rinse with fresh water.

External Milk Frothing Units – these are devices that can be removed from the espresso machine for cleaning. Take the unit apart, clean thoroughly in fresh water, dry and re-assemble. This should be done every time you have finished using the machine. Do not put these units in the dishwasher. Alternatively, clean using the Cino Cleano Milk Frother Cleaner & Sanitiser.

Descaling the Machine

In addition to roasted ground coffee and milk, espresso has one other ingredient – water. But water is not just water. The white crust you see in your kettle is hard water scale which is caused by the heating of water that contains calcium and magnesium ions. All tap water and mineral water contain these ions and they cannot be removed by filtration. They are perfectly safe to drink, however the problem is they cause scale to build up in both the coffee brewing unit and the milk frothing system – the areas of the machine where the water is heated.

This scale reduces the efficiency of the machine by blocking the pipes, tubes and filters. The degree of the problem varies across Australia because different areas have different levels of water hardness.

The solution is to use Cino Cleano Liquid Descaler or Cafetto Restore powder to descale or de-calcify your machine regularly. Descaling your espresso machine will remove hard water scale from both the coffee brewing unit and milk frothing system keeping it working properly.

It is important to recognise that coffee machine cleaners will not remove hard water scale. And since the level of hard water scale in your machine depends on the hardness of the water you use and frequency you use your machine it is not possible to determine how often you should descale your machine. As a rule of thumb do it every 3 to 6 months.

Always use a descaler designed for coffee machines. Some commercially available descalers are very corrosive to certain metals and could be very detrimental to your machine. Always follow the machine and product instructions carefully. Never leave a descaling solution in your machine overnight. Use the product, flush it out and rinse thoroughly before re-using your machine. Unlike Cino Cleano and Cafetto products, many alternate descaling solutions are hazardous and corrosive.

Summary

An espresso machine in your home can give you years of enjoyment. Regular maintenance of your machine is vital. Why spend hundreds or thousands of dollars on an espresso machine and not invest a little money and time to keep it perfect condition?

Cino Cleano and Cafetto products are the perfect products for cleaning and protecting your coffee machine investment and getting the perfect cup of coffee at home.