

How to Care for 316L Stainless Steel Jewelry

Cleaning · Storage · Polishing · The Myths — a factory-floor guide

Why a little care matters

316L forms a self-healing passive chromium-oxide layer in normal air. Care is really about protecting that layer: remove everyday oils and residue, avoid chlorine, and don't abrade the polish. The metal rarely corrodes; the shine just needs occasional restoring.

The 2-minute cleaning routine

For daily-wear pieces, every two to three weeks; before storage for occasional pieces.

- 1 Mix warm water with a drop of mild dish soap.
- 2 Soak 30–60 seconds, then brush textured or engraved areas with a soft toothbrush.
- 3 Rinse under clean running water to remove all soap.
- 4 Pat dry, then finish with a microfiber cloth to bring back the polish.

No jewelry cleaner, no ultrasonic machine, no silver dip. Soap and water remove essentially everything from normal wear.

What to avoid

Avoid	Why
Chlorine (pools, hot tubs, bleach)	Breaks the passive layer; can pit 316L. Remove jewelry before swimming or bleaching.
Harsh abrasives (toothpaste, scouring powder)	Scratch the polish by removing metal — the wrong way to clean.
Perfume / sunscreen on the piece	Leaves a sticky film that looks dull. Apply first, let dry, then wear.
The dishwasher	Alkaline detergent + heat + knocking. Hand-wash only.

Storage

Keep pieces separate (stainless scratches softer metals and tangled chains scratch themselves). Store in a closed box with a silica sachet to keep the surface dry. Anti-tarnish strips are optional — 316L does not tarnish like silver.

Restoring the shine

When a piece looks dull rather than dirty, a standard jewelry **polishing cloth** brings back the mirror finish in seconds. Avoid liquid metal polish meant for sinks or cutlery — too aggressive, and it can strip any PVD color coating. PVD-colored pieces need only soap, water and a soft cloth.

The myths, corrected

“Never tarnishes” — it doesn't oxidize like silver, but a dull film from oils/cosmetics cleans off; the myth is “never needs cleaning.”
“Can't scratch” — false; ~150 HV, harder than gold or silver but it scratches with friction. **“Dishwasher safe”** — no. **“Hypoallergenic for anyone”** — 316L releases nickel far below the EU REACH limit and is widely tolerated, but a confirmed nickel allergy still warrants a patch test.

Quick FAQ

Shower with it? Yes — rinse and dry after. **Sea water?** A swim is fine; rinse and dry. **Dark mark on finger?** Residue from a grooved band, not corrosion — a proper clean removes it. **PVD fading?** Slow wear at high-contact spots is normal; fading within weeks suggests a plating issue to raise with your supplier.