

Keeping your Decent's group head clean

This is written for home users like me who likely make a few coffees a day. I tend to make only one or two. You can be more aggressive than this if you want, but you probably won't gain much.

I'm going to break it down into events, after every shot, weekly, monthly. There's also some **Hints** in italic that add some information about why.

The ***after every shot*** or ***series of shots*** needs to be done then no matter what.

Depending on you, weekly might be monthly or every other month and monthly might be yearly. The downside of cleaning is it uses water and fills up the drip tray, the upside is it keeps the machine clean. And in time lack of cleanliness will lead to worse coffee.

Note that there will be other guides that seem to be much more serious about cleaning. I can't tell you if they are necessary or better than what I document here, but it kept my last machine clean for many years.

After every coffee or every series of coffees

Immediately after you remove the portafilter, press Flush to rinse off the shower screen and then use a rag to wipe off the shower screen.

After every steamed milk

Immediately after steaming use a damp rag I use a quite wet rag, and I don't push people to wipe right away, and risk getting burned by the

puffs. I personally wipe the wand after I pour the latte art. I see people wipe traditional machines while they purge the wand, which strikes me as very dangerous. to wipe off all traces of milk from the steam wand. The sooner you wipe it off, the easier it is to keep clean. Use a dedicated towel for the steam wand as you don't want to accidentally get milk residue on the shower screen.

After every series of coffees (One or more)

Press Flush for a few seconds to rinse the coffee from the shower screen.

As soon as you remove the portafilter, press Flush to rinse off the shower screen. Brush the screen with a group brush or wipe off with a cleaning cloth, and then flush for another few seconds.

Place the blind (no holes) basket in and press Flush till pressure builds and then press Stop. Remove the blind basket, empty it out and set it aside to dry. While conceptually unnecessary, this helps keep the exit side of the group clean and flushes grounds from the Flush Diffuser.

We're trying to remove all the coffee residue, both grounds and brewed. If you want to check how you're doing, take a small piece of paper towel or towel and wipe off the screen, anything that remains will stain the towel and show you how you're doing.

Weekly or Monthly

Clean the water tank and drip tray. Some recommend cleaning the water tank as often as daily, though I personally tend to monthly or even less. Figure out what it takes to keep you comfortable.

Clean with Cafiza or equivalent. Warm up the blind basket and then add some Cafiza, I use about $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon, much less than commonly recommended. Place the portafilter in the group and press Flush and leave it for 30 or 40 seconds before pressing Stop. Or select and run the Cleaning => Forward Flush X5 profile which is designed for cleaning with Cafiza. Remove the portafilter and make sure the water is clean, if not flush for a few seconds, replace the portafilter flush for 10 seconds, remove the portafilter and check again.

You will see recommendations for dissolving the Cafiza in hot water before placing the blind basket in the machine. I did that in the past also, but I was recently loaned a Decent that turns out had stopped working because the Flush Diffuser had become completely clogged with coffee grounds due to inadequate flushing and I had to both learn how to correct that, not easy, and hopefully how to prevent it from ever happening again. It seemed as I experimented, that the more air space there is in the basket, the more effective the flush is at cleaning out everything past the group head. I also noticed that leaving the Cafiza in for longer, 40 seconds in my case was better at cleaning and better at flushing. If you remove the drip tray cover while doing the Cafiza flush, you can see the exhaust when you end the flush, with Cafiza it should be a pretty strong jet of white foam. If that foam is brown, I'd do the Cafiza routine a second time.

Hint: *If the flow seems to be diminishing when flushing with a blind basket, that could indicate the beginnings of a clog. As far as I can tell if you use a blind basket and flush occasionally, you should be OK, but it turns out to be much more important on a Decent than a more typical espresso machine. For those that are mechanically inclined, unclogging the Flush Diffuser is pretty annoying, for those that aren't, it's a trip to the shop.*

Hint: *If you find the Cafiza splashing when it exhausts into the drip trap, removing the screen and placing a damp sponge in the drip tray under the exhaust spout may minimize that problem.*

Hint: *For reasons I don't understand, sometimes the first flush is very light and the second is where the big rush of foam happens, so if you see this, it's not wrong. Just learn how your machine behaves and notice if the behavior changes.*

Monthly or Yearly

Do this when the last step seems to not be enough or just because. Remove the shower screen and the other pieces that come off the underside of the group. Place them in a suitable container, I like ceramic ramekins or small Pyrex pudding cups. Cover with boiling water and then pour off once or twice to warm everything up, Cafiza works best with very hot water. Add ½ teaspoon of Cafiza and then boiling water to cover and then place a lid on the dish, I use generic silicon covers though Saran Wrap or similar works as well. Leave it to soak for a while, an hour is fine. There is no downside leaving to soak for a long time. If the water is disgusting, you can repeat till it's not. If you have to repeat more than once, next time only wait ½ as long. Rinse everything in clean hot water and then when they cool, reinstall them. There are videos on Diaspora showing how to remove and replace those parts.

It seems to be often recommended to remove the third piece held on by 3 or 4 very small screws. If you do this, use only a #2 Phillips in perfect condition. And only put them in snug, they do not need to be very tight, if you tighten them to much they may be very hard to remove. Personally, I'd recommend getting a brand new stubby or at least a short #2 Phillips screwdriver and reserving it for those screws. If

you don't take them out occasionally, they can get very tight and they are very easy to strip. Make sure to hold the screwdriver perfectly straight and use plenty of pressure to hold the driver in the screw when trying to loosen it. The screws if you need to replace them are flat head 3mm X 6mm or 8mm long, Measure the length of the ones you have to make sure of the length. It's ok if you leave one out for a short time while you source a replacement if you messed up one getting it out. Better that than putting it back and not being able to get it out the next time.

It's also recommended to clean the inlet water screen occasionally though it's not uncommon for it to never need cleaning. Remove both trays, then reach back and gently pull the filter straight down. It should slide off with a little resistance. Rinse under water and then slide gently back on holding the lifting lever in the back to keep it from running away.

Useful Tools

These are tools I either have or recommend.

A cloth or three, for wiping the shower screen, steam wand, and also wiping up around the espresso machine, its shot mirror and back panel.

Group Brush: I have a Pallo which has a handle with replaceable brushes and the other end has a spoon for measuring Cafiza. I would only use about ½ spoon.

Espazzola: This is a red plastic portafilter like thing that does a pretty good job of cleaning both the shower screen and group gasket at the same time.

Group gasket brush: This is a brush that looks kind of like a portafilter who's only purpose is to clean the gasket and the slots where the portafilter locks in, I've never had one, but I've been told I should.

Group detergents

Cafiza or Puly Caff are common Italian detergents designed for cleaning coffee oils from coffee brewing equipment. There are other brands that most likely work just as well, but the standard size bottle should last a home user quite a long time, likely years. You can use it for anything that has coffee oils, the like the screen in a French press or an immersion brewer or maybe a Moka Pot. I've never tried it on aluminum so I'd check it on a piece of aluminum foil first or read the back of the bottle. These products are only for cleaning the group on an espresso machine or other coffee implements that collect coffee oils. and should never be used for anything else.

Descaling

Depending on your water, your machine may need to be descaled occasionally. And depending on the water, it may never need to be descaled. There is no downside to descaling other than it takes a lot of time and water. The likely first indication that you need to do this will be issues with steam. You will find that steaming milk is taking longer than it used to. There are instructions and videos on Diaspora that cover how to do this. For descaling a Decent, you will use only pure citric acid added to the water tank and then run the special descaling cycle that uses the solution to dissolve the scale buildup in the thermoblocks.

This document is a present from Ira Emus to the users of the Decent espresso machine. It was written by me with a small amount of help from John Buckman of Decent.

Ira on homebarista.com

Ira on the [basecamp decent board](#)

ira@extrasensory.com