

# THE BONE ROOM

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## How to care for your bone specimens

Bone is a relatively durable material, but a few pointers regarding storage, cleaning, and handling will help you keep your specimens in top shape.

### **Storage**

#### Temperature

Like other natural products, bone is best stored in a cool and dry place. But don't worry about particular temperatures. What is most important is that the temperature stays constant or only changes very slowly. Rapidly fluctuating temperature or humidity makes bone swell and shrink repeatedly, eventually causing it to crumble.

#### Humidity

Do not store wet bone. Allow bone to air dry before putting it away. Do not wrap bone in plastic for long-term storage. Storing wet bone in plastic creates a humid micro-climate that promotes the growth of discoloring molds. Let your bones breathe!

#### Light

Ultraviolet radiation is destructive to the proteins that make up bone. Do not leave bone outdoors or in direct sunlight for long periods of time, as they will become brittle and eventually fall apart.

### **Cleaning**

Because bone is porous, it stains easily and absorbs oils from our skin. To prevent staining, bone should always be handled with clean hands.

Keeping your specimen in a display case or other covered environment will help prevent dust or environmental pollutants from building up.

If your specimen picks up dirt, clean it with warm soapy water using a gentle bristle brush. A soft toothbrush works great. Only wet the surface of the bone, as soaking bone all the way through will hasten decomposition or cause the bone to crack upon drying.

### **Handling**

Handling bones safely is a matter of common sense. Don't handle specimens more than you have to. Hold specimens over a table or other surface. Supervise any handling by children.

Pick up skulls from beneath, watching out for loose mandibles. Never lift a skull by the eye sockets, zygomatic arches (cheekbones), or any other projection not meant to hold weight.

Remember that while strong, bone is not indestructible. But like so many other things, treat your specimens with care and consideration, and they will bring you pleasure for years to come.