Treating and Preventing Tarnish

What is Tarnish?
Unfortunately, tarnish is an inevitable occurrence with any metal except gold and platinum. One way that you know sterling silver is indeed real sterling silver, is that it does tarnish. But what causes it?

Over time, exposure to moisture and air can cause a dark coating called tarnish to form on the surface of silver, copper and brass. Some people like the coating and believe it gives the metal, especially copper, character, but others want the original color and shine back. Removing tarnish should be done carefully to avoid damaging the metal.

Tarnish is actually the result of a chemical reaction between the metal and sulfur in the environment. Sulfurs react with metal, physically breaking down the topmost layer of the metal in a process called “oxidation”. This thin layer of oxidation appears as a discoloration on the metal known as tarnish.

The color and rate of appearance of tarnish can vary widely and depends on the particular metals involved, the environment around the jewelry (heat & humidity) and the length of time the tarnish has built up. For example, sterling silver jewelry is often quick to tarnish, while more pure silvers react slower. The environment you keep your metal jewelry in will also affect the rate of tarnish. High temperatures and high humidity are known to speed the tarnishing process. It is never recommended that you keep your jewelry in your bathroom, for these reasons.

How Can Tarnish Be Prevented?
Tarnish can never be completely prevented. But there are several measures you can take to slow the rate of tarnish. First, control your jewelry’s environment. Keep your jewelry in a cool, dry place. If you live and work in an area with high temperatures and high humidity, this may be a little harder to accomplish, but measures such as anti-tarnish strips placed in your jewelry case can help reduce the gases and humidity in the environment that cause tarnish. Although not stylish, keeping your jewelry in an air tight baggie will help keep tarnish from forming at a rapid rate.

How Can Tarnish Be Removed?
Tarnish is usually removable, although this depends on the depth and severity of the tarnish. Remember, tarnish is actually the remnants of oxidized metal—the only way to remove it is to physically remove the layer of damaged metal. Polishing cloths, such as the Sunshine Cloth we offer online, are great for removing tarnish from a variety of metals, including silver, brass, copper, bronze and more. Other methods are also available using common household products. You can use a very fine grade of steel wool, a green 3-M type scrubbie and our favorite method is a 4 sided sponge used in nail buffing.

We do not recommend you using any type of liquid ‘Dip-It’ type of jewelry cleaner as this may infiltrate the DNA vial part of the Life Jewel and may discolor it.