



# Is your Nato strap damaging your watch?

Over a long period of wear, a Nato strap can cause a watch's case back to develop 'Nato rash'. So what to do?

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The allure of a [Nato](#) – and indeed Zulu and single-pass ("pull through") straps – is not hard to fathom. There's the ease of changing the colour to match your mood; there's the comfort, the utility vibe, the fact it works on a [Rolex](#) just as well as a Seiko. The big difference compared to regular two-piece straps, of course, is that the fabric sits between your wrist and the case back. But does that present a problem?

One of the advantages of having worked in auction houses is that huge numbers of watches passed through my hands in various conditions and ages. One thing I noticed was that on military pieces and 1970s watches (the last time nylon straps were in wide use – yes, I am old enough to remember), you would often see a broad stripe down the stainless-steel case back that exactly matched the width of the strap. This varied from a faint, but perceptible haze to clear imprints of the nylon weave.



Marks from a Nato strap

As Nato straps have gone mainstream and manufacturers of all price levels have started including them in the box at purchase, it occurred to me that owners may not be aware of the long-term effects of nylon on steel. The latest Nato resurgence is relatively recent, but if those old 1970s watches are anything to go by, regular Nato wearing for a decade or three might make some indelible impressions on your watch case.

A tour of the watch forums suggests that the new era's early adopters are starting to see the effects. In defence of their fabric friends, the damage is put down to dirt and grime between the strap and the steel – suggesting that cleanliness is the way to prolonged shininess. Certainly, sand and grit will make matters worse, but even the cleanest straps will cause a problem, given long enough. Other Nato fans advocate a softer strap or the “seatbelt” style weave, forgetting that whatever the texture nylon is still nylon and, boy, is it tough.



Another example of 'Nato rash'

If this sounds a little unbelievable, try taking one of those green nylon washing-up pads to a mirror-finish saucepan. Then imagine smaller repeated movements against your watch's case back over months and years.

So should you abandon your Natos in favour of two-pieces only? Absolutely not! Just remember there are consequences to playing dress-up and if your watch wants to act like a mil-spec tool-watch then it has to pay the price and tough it out – it's only a little chafing after all. Indeed, such marks on the back of a vintage military watch are proof it saw action on a wrist, rather than sitting on a shelf in a quartermaster's store.