



Is Your Grout Trying to Tell You Something?

A one page walkthrough. Take it into your bathroom and tick what you find.

1 Start here: the 60 second water drop test

SEALED

Water beads and sits on top after 60 seconds. Your seal is holding.

WEARING OUT

Water flattens and the grout darkens between 30 and 60 seconds. Reseal it this season.

FAILED

Water soaks in and darkens the grout in under 30 seconds. Water is reaching the substrate now.

2 The 7 signs moisture is already involved

WHAT YOU SEE	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	WHAT IT ACTUALLY MEANS	DO THIS
☐ 1. Cracks come back in the same spot	A hairline that reopens weeks after it was filled, always in the same joint.	Not a grout problem. Something under the tile is moving.	Schedule
☐ 2. Dark grout that will not clean	A patch that stays grey or brown no matter what you scrub it with.	The color is coming from behind the tile, not off the surface.	Schedule
☐ 3. Soft, powdery or crumbling grout	It scratches away with a fingernail and leaves grit.	The binder is gone. Sealer cannot rescue grout that is breaking down.	Schedule
☐ 4. White chalky deposits	A dusty white bloom on the grout or tile face, often near the floor.	Efflorescence. Mineral salts carried out by water moving through the wall.	Monitor
☐ 5. A musty smell near the tile	Damp, earthy smell at low walls or the floor that returns after cleaning.	Growth behind the tile. The EPA notes mold can start on damp surfaces in 24 to 48 hours.	Call now
☐ 6. Tiles that sound hollow	Tap lightly with a knuckle. A hollow knock instead of a solid tap.	The bond has let go. ANSI A108.02 requires 95% thinset coverage in wet areas.	Schedule
☐ 7. Caulk that keeps separating	The corner or the tub joint opens again within months of being redone.	Movement and moisture where two planes meet. This is where showers usually give way.	Call now

3 Where to look, in the order that finds problems fastest

- ☐ 1. Shower corners and the pan. Two planes meeting, and the lowest point water reaches. Most failures start here.
- ☐ 2. The lower third of the shower walls. Where water sits longest and where hollow tiles usually show up first.
- ☐ 3. The joint where tile meets the tub. Different materials, different movement. Check for a caulk line that has opened.
- ☐ 4. The floor just outside the shower. Grout here takes splash daily and is often never sealed after the first year.
- ☐ 5. Backsplash and sink edges. Low risk, but a good control. If this grout beads and the shower does not, you have your answer.
- ☐ 6. Use a raking light. Hold a flashlight almost flat to the wall. A hairline crack that vanishes under overhead light will throw a shadow.

What I found, and where

Handle it yourself when

- The water drop test says sealed or wearing out, and nothing else on this list is ticked.
- You have one isolated hairline crack that has never come back before.
- Caulk has failed once, in one place. Clean it, dry it, redo it, and give it 24 hours before water.
- Efflorescence wipes off with a pH neutral cleaner and does not return within a week. Never use acid on grout.

Call a professional when

- You ticked two or more boxes. Together they strongly suggest active moisture.
- There is a musty smell, or any tile sounds hollow.
- The same joint has failed twice. The problem is behind the caulk, not in it.
- Grout is soft or crumbling anywhere in a shower.
- Do not caulk over a crack to hide it. That seals the moisture inside the wall.