

JUNE 2022

HOME AND FAMILY:



AN
INTEGRATIVE
GUIDE FOR A
HEALTHY
HOME
ENVIRONMENT



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Abstract

Your home environment matters too

When we're talking about improving our health, we tend to put the spotlight on diet, exercise and our sleeping habits. But since our homes are where we spend most of our time, it's just as important to figure out ways to improve the atmosphere of our living spaces. From filtering out pollutants and purifying the air to adding a touch of green and swapping out dirty rags, these are some ways to help you create a healthier home.

Getting Started

HEALTHY HOMES - WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?



Healthy Homes is a first in Australia. At one level, it can be seen simply as a government program. We're upgrading 1000 houses, with eligibility criteria around low income and chronic health needs. We're targeting vulnerable householders and doing a pretty straightforward package of interventions like better insulation, efficient heating, draught stopping and window covering.

You use less energy, you pay less in your bills and there's fewer greenhouse gas emissions. It's the ultimate package hitting several targets.

It can cost up to \$3,500 per household, so it's not costing the earth and it makes households more thermally efficient and comfortable. You use less energy, you pay less in your bills and there's fewer greenhouse gas emissions. It's the ultimate package hitting several targets.

How can making your home energy efficient impact your health?

The interesting thing about the way we're doing our 1000 household upgrades is that we take 500 of them and upgrade the houses before winter, and they're the intervention group. For the other 500, we wait until after winter to upgrade their houses. Everyone gets the upgrade, but we have a winter period in between where we can compare how well the houses are performing.

We're hoping that when we get to the end of Healthy Homes, we can show that a simple, inexpensive intervention leads to better health outcomes.

For the upgraded houses, we're predicting warmer temperatures and healthier and happier people paying less in energy bills compared to the householders in the control group. We're hoping that when we get to the end of Healthy Homes, we can show that a simple, inexpensive intervention leads to better health outcomes.

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We're aiming for the research gold standard. We need evidence on which to base our decisions and government policies, and a randomized controlled trial is the most reliable form of evidence. Once we have the evidence, we'll be able to make an informed argument about increasing Australian housing standards. When people think about their house, they should be thinking about their health right alongside.

What is the recommended temperature inside our homes during the day? And what does this mean for those experiencing vulnerability, especially during COVID-19?

After summarising all the research evidence, the World Health Organisation concluded that 18 degrees was a reasonable minimum indoor temperature to protect health in cold seasons. With regards to vulnerable people and COVID-19, this is relevant on a couple of fronts. Probably the most obvious being that when we're in lockdown, we're being told to stay at home. People are spending much more time at home than they normally do. So instead of

having a warm work environment or a public library to visit, people are at home all day, every day and really experiencing the cold coming into winter.

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There's plenty of people out there living in poor housing stock with not necessarily the means to upgrade it. So that's really what we're trying to help with. We're starting with the most vulnerable as it's going to particularly benefit them at this time when older people with chronic health needs are spending so much time at home.

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Along the way we've been having some great feedback from people who have had their houses upgraded and say things like 'I don't need to drag the portable electric heater into my room at night any more for those cold nights that really exacerbate my illness'. The idea is that we impact the lives of these vulnerable people in a really positive way.

I. How to Make Your Home a Healthy One?

Making your home healthier and greener doesn't have to be expensive, or overwhelming. Just a few changes can improve the health of your home, everyone in it -- and the planet it sits on.



Some of these are easy fixes. Others challenge us to re-examine a lifetime of habits.

Avoiding or limiting exposure to toxic chemicals is at the top of every parent's list. "Toxic chemicals are everywhere, so exposure is really difficult to avoid," says Sonya Lunder, MPH, a senior researcher with Environmental Working Group, a nonprofit organization that researches environmental issues. "But there are things people can do to be proactive."

Among the key toxins are lead and pesticides. Studies have linked overexposure to lead and pesticides with brain and central nervous system damage, behavior problems, asthma, cancer, and more.

So how can you cut down your exposure to these chemicals and other potential household risks? Here are the top 10 suggestions from WebMD's experts. (And in some cases, you'll even save money!)

1. Get house dust under control.

House dust aggravates allergies. It also contains more hazardous chemicals than you might think, including lead, fire retardants, pesticides, and other chemicals.

"It's nothing you can afford to take lightly," Lunder tells WebMD. "Even if these chemicals were used decades earlier in your home, they can still accumulate in your house dust today."

The solutions: The best -- and most expensive -- option is to replace wall-to-wall carpeting (a collector for dust and allergens) with wood, cork, tile, or non-vinyl linoleum. But if that's not economically feasible, some old-fashioned elbow grease can help. Vacuum frequently -- meticulously getting into corners, along the floorboards, and moving furniture to get those dust bunnies.

Make sure your vacuum has strong suction and a HEPA filter so that dust and dirt go into the bag.

- Vacuum at least two times each week.
- Clean the vacuum bag and filter every time, so dust isn't spewed back into the air.

2. Kick nicotine addiction.

If you're still a smoker, it's time to kick it.

An estimated 40% of Australia's children are exposed to secondhand smoke at home -- and it's the biggest trigger of asthma in those children, says Philip Landrigan, MD, director of the Children's Environmental Health Center at Mount Sinai School of Medicine.

And it's an expensive habit. "You can save a lot of money if you're not smoking, not to speak of future health costs for you and your family," he tells WebMD.

A doctor, nurse, or mental health professional can help you tailor an approach to quitting smoking that best suits your needs. Set a quit date and stick to it.

3. Get your home tested.

Both lead paint and radon are serious hazards you can't afford to ignore. Lead poisoning is known to cause brain damage in a developing fetus and in young children if not treated. Radon is a cancer-causing radioactive gas.

The main source of lead is old paint and dust that forms when paint chips and erodes, Landrigan explains. Lead paint can be a problem in any home built before 1978, when lead paint was banned.

"In tough economic times, we have to make wise decisions with our money - and a lead test is one of those," says Landrigan. "Lead poisoning is tragic, and it happens too often. We're not just talking about the big cities. Older homes everywhere may have lead paint."

- Check with your local health department about lead paint testing. A lab test of a paint chip runs from \$20 to \$50 per sample. You can also hire a certified professional to test your home, which will cost more.
- The Consumer Product Safety Commission has a safety alert on its web site about lead-based paint testing. It offers guidelines on reducing your exposure -- like covering walls with gypsum wallboard.

Colorless and odorless, radon gas comes from the natural breakdown of the soil and rock underneath your home. Any home can have a radon gas problem -- whether it's old or new, well-sealed or drafty, whether it has a basement or not.

Breathing air containing radon gas can cause lung cancer. In fact, it's the second leading cause of lung cancer, after smoking. If you smoke and your home has high radon levels, your risk of lung cancer is especially high.

4. Ditch pesticides.

Pesticides kill roaches, mice, ants, and lawn pests. But overexposure and chronic small exposures may put children at risk of a range of health problems, including asthma, learning disabilities, and problems with brain development.

These chemicals are expensive, too. "These pesticides are not cheap," says Landrigan. "You can easily spend a hundred bucks on one Saturday morning on them."

The problem is, "people don't see the damage the chemicals are doing to themselves and to their child," he tells WebMD. "It's silent, but nevertheless real damage."

Save money and promote health by focusing on prevention. Simple steps can keep roaches away -- like washing dishes very carefully, cleaning up all food residue, keeping food packages and containers tightly closed, and sealing any cracks that are a point of entry into your home.

Instead of spraying herbicides on your lawn, "don't be so worried about weeds," says Landrigan. "Get used to a little imperfection. Rather than spraying, your time is better spent burning calories -- pulling weeds," he says.

You can learn about non-chemical, commonsense ways of reducing indoor and lawn/garden pests -- a concept called Integrated Pest Management. Look for the EPA's on-line booklet: "Citizen's Guide to Pest Control and Pesticide Safety."

5. Be careful with plastic bottles and canned foods.

The safety of bisphenol A, a chemical found in polycarbonate plastics, is still being debated. These plastics are used in some water bottles and baby bottles.

Bisphenol A is also used in epoxy resins that line metal products like canned foods.

The FDA and the Australian Chemistry Council say bisphenol A is safe for use. However, another government report -- the National Toxicology Report -- found concern about effects on the brain, prostate gland, and behavior in fetuses, infants, and children. And one study found that adults with high

levels of BPA in their urine were more likely to have a history of heart disease or diabetes, compared to people with low levels of BPA.

What can you do to limit exposure to BPA?

- Look for safer water or baby bottles -- either tempered glass bottles or plastic bottles made of cloudy plastics like polyethelene or polypropylene (recycling symbols 1, 2 or 5) are generally safe. Avoid those marked with a "7" or "PC."
- Don't microwave plastic food containers. Heat can break down plastic fibers.
- Don't microwave with cling wraps. Put food in a glass or ceramic dish and then cover with waxed paper or paper towels.
- Eat fewer canned foods.
- Use glass and ceramic containers to store or microwave foods.

6. Filter your tap water.

Filtered tap water may be a better choice of drinking water than bottled water. In a recent study, the Environmental Working Group tested 10 best-selling brands of bottled water. Researchers found mixtures of 38 contaminants, including bacteria, fertilizer, and industrial chemicals -- all at levels similar to those found in tap water.

Here's the catch: Tap water is regulated by the EPA, which requires yearly public reports identifying the contaminants found in local water sources. But bottled water is regulated by the FDA, which has no such requirement.

"But even if you live in a place where drinking water is considered good, there can still be trace amounts of chemicals that may be toxic," says Baker. Although your local water company filters tap water, it still comes through with contaminants -- including lead, chlorine, E. coli, pesticides. Simply filtering your tap water can remove lots of these pollutants.

A simple pitcher-type water filter may be all you need for very drinkable water, Baker advises. There are also filters that attach to a faucet or to the plumbing system. Consumer Reports has published a review of 27 water filters.

Filtering your tap water "is an easy thing to do -- you don't have to invest a lot of money in it," she says. "You just change the filters regularly. It's a 'better safe than sorry' approach." You'll also cut down on waste in landfills by not buying - and then tossing - plastic bottles.

7. Temper the Teflon.

If you've got pots and pans with Teflon coating -- or other nonstick cookware - make sure you use them wisely. Perfluorinated (PFCs) chemicals are used to make these nonstick coatings, and the chemicals can accumulate in the body. The EPA lists PFOA (one type of PFCs used in Teflon) as a "likely human carcinogen," although there's no evidence that Teflon-coated pans cause cancer.

DuPont and other companies have agreed, in response to government pressure, to eliminate use of PFOA by 2015. In the meantime, you can switch to other cookware now: stainless steel, anodized aluminum, copper-coated pans, cast iron, or enamel-coated iron. Silicone baking molds are also safe to use.

If you can't do without your nonstick cookware - or if it's too expensive to replace right away -- then follow safe cooking practices. Don't preheat pans on high, and use the lowest temperature you can to cook food.

Two other places you'll find PFCs - in grease-resistant food packaging and as a stain-protection treatment. Reducing greasy packaged foods and fast foods in your diet (like microwave popcorn, French fries, and pizza) not only lowers your exposure, it's also good for your heart.

If it's time to replace a big-ticket item like a sofa, say no to stain-protection treatments, advises Baker. "These add-ons cost money, and the health implications are not really known."

8. Wash your hands.

We hear this during cold and flu season -- frequent hand-washing keeps germs from getting passed around. But for young children, hand-washing is a good habit that can keep them from ingesting toxins like fire retardants in house dust. What your vacuum doesn't pick up, a toddler's hands will.

"Hand-washing may be boring, but it's really key to keeping stuff on a child's hands from getting into their mouths," says Lunder.

Another tip: Skip antibacterial soap, because some researchers believe that the quest for hyper-cleanliness may have led to weakened immune systems, and possibly to more cases of asthma and allergies. It's also been speculated that these products may contribute to bacteria-resistant "super germs."

In fact, new research has also shown that triclosan -- the main ingredient in antibacterial soap, deodorants, toothpaste, mouthwash, cosmetics, fabrics and plastic kitchenware -- has the potential to affect sex hormones and interfere with the nervous system.

And studies show regular soap and water works just as well for killing germs. It's about the process, not the product. Moisten hands, rub thoroughly with soap (getting backs of hands, between fingers, and around nail beds), and rinse. Singing the ABC's while you do it will ensure you do it for an adequate amount of time (20 seconds). Be sure adults in your house wash their hands frequently, especially after coming indoors. Ask visitors to do the same.

9. Use non-toxic cleaning products.

The conventional cleaning supplies under your sink -- with their "warning" and "poison" labels -- contain a potent mix of chemicals.

"If you've ever mopped with ammonia, you know how your lungs constrict," says Lunder. "These chemicals have a very powerful effect on kids with asthma. You're polluting the indoor air when you don't need to." When washed down the drain, they also pollute rivers and lakes.

Look for "green" cleaners that don't contain chlorine or ammonia. Choose ones that say "petroleum-free," "biodegradable," or "phosphate-free."

Or make a cleaner yourself.

Home-brew suggestions:

- Use vinegar instead of bleach, baking soda to scrub your tiles, and hydrogen peroxide to remove stains.
- Vinegar also removes grease and soap buildup.
- Need a window cleaner? Try diluted lemon juice or vinegar. Use borax to inhibit mold growth, boost the cleaning power of soap or detergent, remove stains -- even kill cockroaches, when sugar is mixed in.

You can also engage a professional cleaning company for house cleaning.

As there are so many different types and sizes of companies in the market that choosing the right one can be difficult. What makes this already difficult task even harder is the fact that all companies claim to be the best in the business.

Luckily, there are a few questions that can help you find a genuine company that offers reliable end of lease cleaning in Melbourne. All you need to do is talk to different companies and ask them questions related to the price, their service, and professionals. These questions will help you to find out the best company.



Here is the list of 10 questions to ask a professional cleaning company.

Question 1: How Many Years Have You Been In The Cleaning Business?

Every company begin somewhere, but nobody wants their property to be used as a training ground by any newly formed company. Experience matters and companies with more experience are better at what they do. Enthusiasm is also crucial, but it cannot compensate for a lack of experience. So seek a company that is passionate but more importantly has a proven track record.

Question 2: Do You Bring Your Own Equipment And Supplies?

Some Melbourne cleaning companies bring their own materials and equipment, while others only bring the equipment and expect customers to supply the supplies. Many companies nowadays use both store-bought and environmentally friendly products. So, you can always talk about it and request specific products.

Question 3: Can You Provide With Reference Of Previous Customers?

Ask whether they can provide you with a list of at least three recent customers for whom they have provided cleaning services. To find out if the cleaning company in question has delivered high-quality service and if there have been any previous complaints or other concerns, contact the previous customers over the phone.

Question 4: What Is Excluded In Your Cleaning?

Another important question that you must ask a company is the areas or surfaces that they do not clean. Different companies follow their list, so you must know what you are paying for. If a company do not clean basic surfaces like carpets, windows, toilet, etc., then look for other options.

Question 5: Do You Subcontract Out Your Work To A Third Party?

You should also ask the company if they clean on their own or subcontract out their work to a third party. Many companies follow this policy because they have a lot of work.

However, it might not help you to pass the final inspection. This lack of transparency can lead to confusion and chaos. So, if you are looking for a company that offers the best end of lease cleaning in Melbourne, make sure they perform the task on their own.

Question 6: Do You Have A Website?

Ask the company about their website. All reputed companies, irrespective of the field, maintain a detailed website where the customers can know about the company, their services or products, and the locations they cover.

If a company doesn't have a website or doesn't have enough information on it, you should look for other options. The website will help you to find trustworthy cleaning services in Melbourne.

Question 7: What Type Of Quality Assurance Program Can I Expect?

Quality assurance is a sign of a genuine and efficient cleaning company, so do not forget to ask this question. A reputed company never hesitate to give the assurance of their quality. If the landlord finds any flaws after the cleaning, the company resend their cleaners to rectify the issue at no extra charge.

Question 8: How Do You Set Your Rates?

Some service providers charge on hourly basis, while others charge as per the overall job. And there are also some that charge by the number of people

they deploy. In most cases, the rate is determined by the size of the home, its condition, and the task that must be completed. Look for a cleaning business that follows this approach and provide you with a free quote.

Question 9: How Do You Have Trained And Verified Employees?

You should also ask the company whether they trained their professionals with the latest cleaning tools and techniques. It is also the company's responsibility to make sure that all their employees are police verified.

Question 10: Do You Follow Green Cleaning?

Many companies have realised the importance of green cleaning and already started following it. You should ask the company whether they also use eco-friendly products or not. Such companies prepare their cleaning solution using natural ingredients like essential oils, baking soda, vinegar, etc.

Choosing the best end of lease cleaners in Melbourne can be a stressful task when moving out of the property. However, you can make the task easier by judging and selecting a company based on the questions mentioned above. As the selection process is time-consuming, it is advisable to start your research as soon as you decide to relocate.

10. Eat organic, eat healthy.

When you eat organic food, you ingest fewer pesticides. You're also helping protect the environment.

More pluses: Research shows that some organic food is more nutritious - organic fruits and vegetables have 25% higher levels of many nutrients than conventional produce.

However, organic produce can be 20% more expensive than conventional. Organic meats and dairy products might be three times the cost of conventional items.

Cut the cost of eating organic foods by:

- Buying in-season produce, which is plentiful and often cheaper at your local farmer's market.
- Selectively buy the produce that absorbs the most pesticide if not organic -- like berries, which soak up more pesticides than other fruit. You don't really need organic bananas, since they're protected by a peel.
- Buy organic for the foods you eat most often.

If you're pregnant or breastfeeding, aim for good health in the kitchen:

- Getting plenty of omega-3 fats - like those from fatty fish and walnuts -- when breastfeeding seems to protect the fetus' brain development from toxins, Lunder says. (Note: Some fish are high in contaminants like mercury or PCBs that can harm child development. Select safer seafoods, such as shrimp, canned light tuna, and salmon.)
- Iodine also helps offset negative effects from fire retardants, she adds. That's easy with a prenatal vitamin with iodine.

You could even try the taste of edible flowers -- like those that grow in your lawn, when you quit using pesticides. "Dandelions are salad in France," Landrigan says.

II. Why Cleaning is Important? The Powerful Psychology Behind Cleanliness

Keeping things clean and organised is good for you, and science can prove it.



Maintaining an organised schedule and a list of short-term goals can help you stay in shape. A study in the Journal of Obesity found that people who carefully plan their exercise regimen, set goals and regularly record their progress are more likely to keep up an exercise program than people who show up at the gym without a clear plan in mind.

What makes staying organised so difficult?

If staying organised is so good for you, why doesn't everyone do it?

1. You have too much clutter.

The problem: As we go through life, we pick up little (or big) objects that we don't necessarily need. For instance, you might own a bag of fertilizer from back when you thought you'd start a garden. You might have a collection of old birthday cards or a waffle iron on your kitchen counter that you never use. These objects take up space that could be better used by other, more necessary items.

The solution: Getting rid of clutter can be difficult, especially since we often attach emotional feelings to old objects. Try your best to donate or throw away your clutter. If you're afraid to let certain things go, try taking photographs of them so that you'll always have a physical reminder. You might also find new places to store these objects as your house becomes more organised.

2. You don't have enough time.

The problem: Organizing just one room takes a LOT of time. When faced with the prospect of organizing your entire home, you might be tempted to give up before you start. How are you supposed to keep up with your career, your family, and your hobbies if you're spending all of your time cleaning? Unfortunately, when your home is disorganised, you work less efficiently, giving you even less free time. It can become a vicious cycle.

The solution: As with any daunting project, take things one step at a time. Spend 30 minutes a day on cleaning and organisation. If you don't have time for that, try 15 minutes. If you don't have time for that, try 10 minutes. The website [Unfilth Your Habitat](#) (sometimes called [Unfilth Your Habitat](#)) is a fun, helpful way to break down chores into small bites.

3. You forget how nice it feels to be organised.

The problem: Few things are more satisfying than entering a perfectly clean home. Unfortunately, once your house is clean, it becomes easier to slip into bad habits. You might be tempted to leave your jacket on the floor because going to the coat rack feels like too much work. Or you might squeeze a book into an overcrowded bookshelf, because what's one book anyway? Soon enough, your home will be just as disorganised as before.

The solution: Look at organisation porn. Read an anti-clutter blog. Remember this article. People who keep their homes clean and organised are healthier, both physically and mentally. Spending the time and effort to keep your space clean is well worth it.

Why do we love organization?

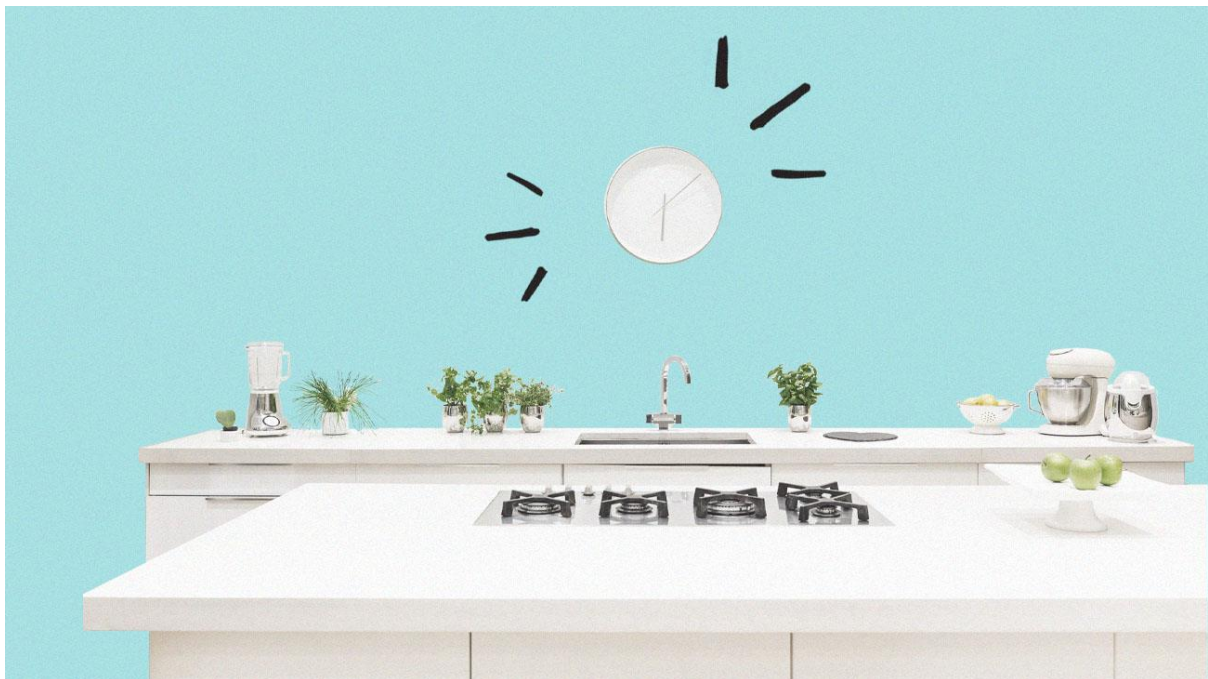
The human body is made up of tens of thousands of integrated biological and neurochemical systems, all of which are organized. Many of our cells operate on strict schedules or circadian rhythms. Even at the atomic level, we are well-regulated and well-organized. Without this organization, our bodies would collapse into chaos.

It wouldn't be surprising, then, if the reason we crave symmetry and cleanliness in our homes is to mirror the organization within our very own bodies. Neatness and order support health — and oppose chaos.

Regardless of the why, however, it's clear that staying clean and organized is a good thing. It helps us feel better about ourselves, it keeps us productive and it may very well keep us physically fit. The next time we bemoan having to clean our home, let's try to keep these things in mind. We'll feel much better when everything is organized.

III. How to Clean: DIY Tips for Keeping Your Home Healthy

Regular cleaning is an important part of keeping your home healthy.



This includes preventing and mitigating bacteria, viruses, and other pests like moths, silverfish, and bedbugs that can do harm if left unchecked.

And regular cleaning is even more crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic. SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, can live on some surfaces in your home for days.

Luckily, it's easy to get rid of the virus material from these surfaces with some basic disinfectants and cleaning procedures.

Read on to learn about some common trouble spots around the house and solutions for keeping your living spaces safe and healthy.

How to clean a kitchen

Everyone gravitates to the kitchen.

Part restaurant, part entertainment center, and part family room, it's ground zero for the most troublesome spots in the home. Practically every surface is a magnet for bacteria, viruses, germs, insects, and other pests.

Your kitchen can also be one of the most likely places you can transfer a virus, like SARS-CoV-2, into your household. A 2020 study found that this coronavirus can live for hours or days on many common kitchen surfaces:

- copper: 8 hours
- cardboard: 24 hours
- stainless steel: 48 hours
- plastic: 3 days

Here are some general tips for disinfecting your kitchen surfaces to prevent COVID-19:

- Wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds before you touch anything, especially if you've been outside or at work.
- Sanitize your hands with a 60 percent (or higher) alcohol sanitizer if soap and water aren't immediately available.
- Regularly wipe down all kitchen surfaces, including counters, tabletops, and any other surface you frequently touch, like stove or microwave buttons. Use an EPA-approved disinfectant if available.
- Wash all dishes and silverware before and after you use them.

In the bedroom

Whether you share a bed with someone else or not, you're never alone in bed.

Dust, dust mites, and possibly pet dander keep you company all the time. These bed bugs add to poor air quality and can irritate the best of us, whether you're allergic or not allergic to them.

This is because dust mites produce waste and lay eggs. Add hair, dead skin, fungi, and pollen, and you get an allergen-filled combination that can pack a wallop to sensitive individuals.

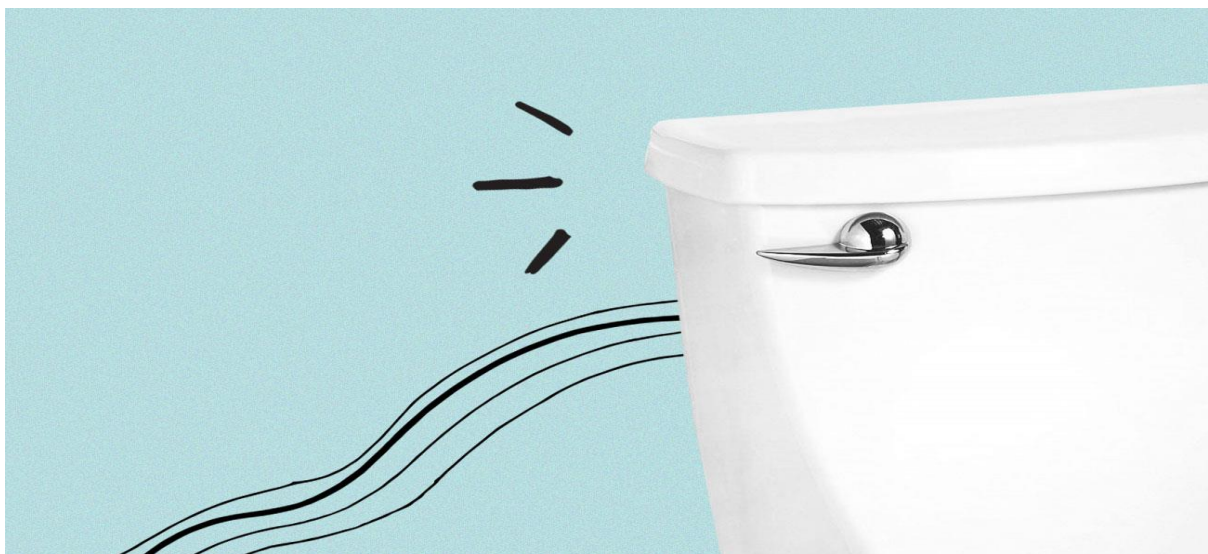
Here are some tips to get rid of dust mites:

- Use zippered plastic mattress and pillow covers.
- Once a week, wash all bedding in hot water above 130°F to kill dust mites.
- Vacuum uncovered mattresses regularly.

In the bathroom

The bathroom is a relatively new thing. For thousands of years, people relied on outhouses and public baths, and for good reason — to keep pathogens and waste away from living quarters.

Today, we have the luxury of toilets and bathtubs, and pathogens can lurk where you wouldn't expect them.



- **Toilet handle**

The toilet may be an easy mark for potential health dangers in the bathroom, but it's for a reason you might not expect.

Sure, you know to keep the bowl and the seat clean, but how often do you clean the flush handle? Rotavirus, enterococcus, and other nasty pests can live there.

Enterococcus can cause bacterial gastroenteritis. Rotavirus is the most common cause of diarrhea among children.

The new coronavirus can also survive on steel and plastic toilet handles for up to 3 days.

Keep the flush handle sanitized with a disinfectant that specifically lists fighting bacteria or viruses on the label. Sanitizing with a 60 percent alcohol solution can also help remove the virus particles of SARS-CoV-2.

- **Floor to ceiling**

Mold can thrive in the bathroom and present a number of health problems, from watery, itchy eyes to asthma attacks.

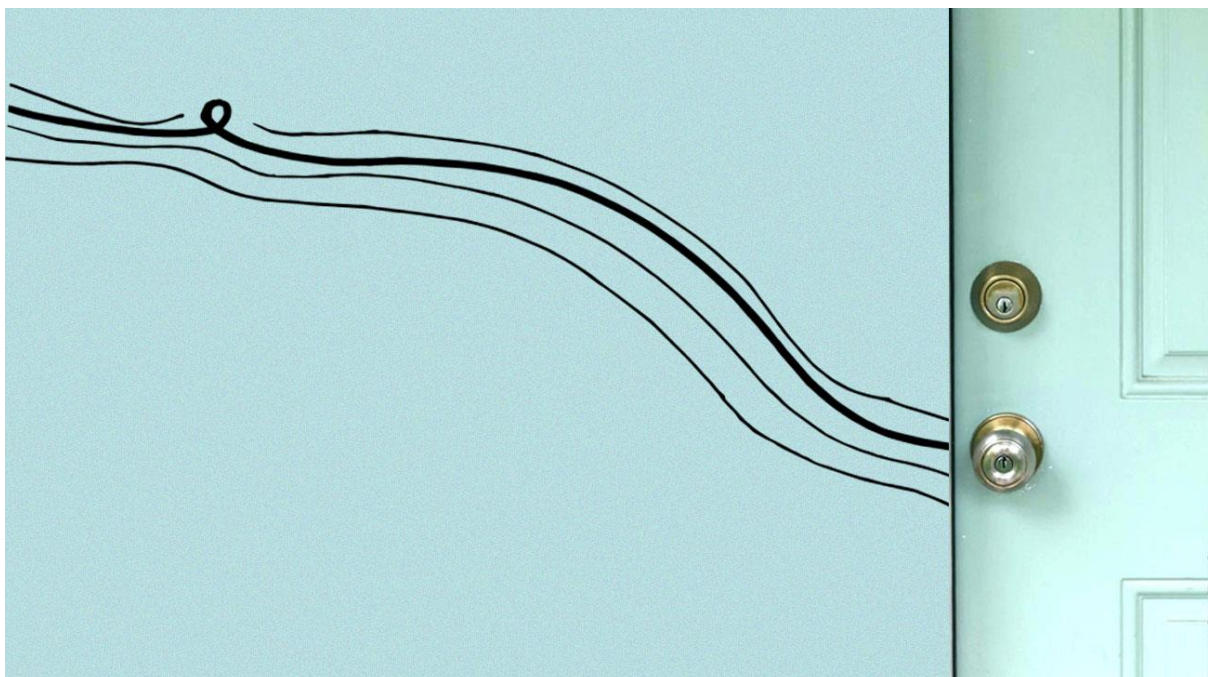
Another danger lurking in your bathroom, and possibly throughout your house, is trichophyton.

This fungus causes ringworm and athlete's foot and can be passed from one person's foot to the next via flooring.

Here are some tips to clean mold and trichophyton:

- ✓ Use a disinfectant designed to kill mold and fungus in the bathroom.
- ✓ After bathing or showering, wipe down the tub or shower walls and curtain with a towel or squeegee. Some shower curtains can even be thrown in the washing machine.
- ✓ Throw soiled tissues away and empty the wastebasket daily. Don't leave them lying around the room or on top of the counter.

Cleaning house



Bacteria and viruses can easily spread in other commonly used surfaces in your home, too.

- **Doorknobs**

They do more than allow you into your home or a room. These handles can carry staph, short for *Staphylococcus aureus*, a common bacterium.

While usually not a threat, staph can be harmful if it enters your mouth, eyes, cuts, or scrapes, and can cause a wide spectrum of problems.

The new coronavirus can also get on your doorknobs if you're regularly going to work or going out and then touching doorknobs before washing your hands.

A good swipe of the doorknob with an antibacterial cleaner or 60 percent alcohol solution will keep staph and other harmful microorganisms at bay.

- **Walls**

If walls could talk, they would probably ask you to reconsider your paint choice — not the color but the type. Paints contain volatile organic compounds (VOCs), a huge source of indoor air pollution.

These chemicals, also found in upholstery, textiles, and other building materials, can cause a number of health-related issues. Of critical concern are paints in older homes that might contain lead.

The manufacturing of lead-based paint was banned in 1978. If your house was built after that, you're probably fine on this one.

To reduce your exposure to these toxic vapors, choose low-VOC paints, milk paints, or whitewashes.

In older homes, check for the presence of lead by hiring a licensed risk assessor or by purchasing a lead home test kit at your local hardware store.

If you discover lead in your home, inquire about lead removal products at the hardware store or hire an experienced specialist to remove it.

- **Carpets and rugs**

Many carpets and the adhesives and padding needed to install them emit the same VOCs as paint.

Some people experience flu-like symptoms after installing new carpet and others complain of eye, nose, and throat irritation.

Here are some ways you can avoid these symptoms and health issues related to VOCs in carpets and rugs:

- ✓ Ask that your carpet be aired out before installation.
- ✓ Open windows and doors and use fans to allow as much air to circulate in the room as possible.
- ✓ Consider selecting carpet and related products that meet low-VOC emitting criteria for indoor air quality acceptance.
- ✓ Vacuum your carpets and rugs frequently to ease allergic reactions to dust and pet dander.
- ✓ Open windows periodically to help ventilate a room, especially after installing new carpet or painting walls.
- ✓ Consider using an air purifier or house plants to filter toxins and any airborne VOCs out of the air.

SARS-CoV-2 can survive on carpets, rugs, and other fibers or fabrics for several hours.

You're not likely to get the virus from these sources, but you can track the virus throughout your home if you walk on a contaminated carpet or rug and then to other rooms in your home.

Shake out your rugs regularly and steam clean your carpets as often as you can.

An air purifier may also help capture any infected respiratory droplets^{Trusted Source} and airborne moisture particles (known as aerosols) from coughs or sneezes that may contain the coronavirus.

- **Dust**

We sometimes think of household dust as dirt, but it's much more than that.

A 2016 review published in the *Environmental Science & Technology* journal shows how household dust resembles a "parking lot for chemicals" in your home.

Researchers have identified 45 potentially harmful chemicals in household dust to examine. At least 10 of these chemicals were in almost all the samples taken from sites throughout the United States.

According to the review, dust can contribute to a wide array of health problems, including:

- ✓ allergies

- ✓ asthma
- ✓ respiratory problems
- ✓ cancers and disorders of the reproductive and nervous systems

These effects can increase in the winter when we typically spend more time indoors.

Dust can amount to a toxic soup made up of chemicals from fragrances, cleaning products, personal care products, and even the building materials your house is made of.

To keep problems from dust to a minimum, the Department of Housing and Urban Development recommends that you keep your home:

- ✓ clean
- ✓ dry
- ✓ well-ventilated
- ✓ maintained
- ✓ free of pests
- ✓ free of contaminants

Bottom Line

We take for granted a lot of modern conveniences, and some of these can bring harmful chemicals, germs, and safety risks into the home.

Take a few extra steps and precautions to make and keep your home a safe haven.

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