



**FOLLOW THIS CHECKLIST
TO CONVERT YOUR
HOME'S ENVIRONMENT
INTO A HEALTHY AND
HAPPY ONE**

ABSTRACT

It's easy to blame a toxic work environment, cluttered house, or rainy weather for your deteriorating mental health. But sometimes, your perception of the environment contributes to how you feel. For example, one study found that when people with depression perceived that they had poor social support, their symptoms, recovery, and social functioning was worse.

How Does Your Environment Affect Your Mental Health?



The places where you spend a lot of time—home, work, school, and even socially—can have a significant impact on your mental well-being. In psychology, these are referred to as environmental factors of mental health and are the main focus of study for environmental psychologists.

Identifying the environmental factors that can affect you psychologically can shed light on whether the locations you frequent are contributing to or detracting from

your mental wellness. It can also help you recognize if changes are needed to start feeling better mentally and emotionally.

How Environment Affects Mental Health

In some cases, environmental factors impact mental wellness by changing brain structure and function. Research on children supports this, noting that children raised in adverse environments tend to have hindered brain development, increasing their risk of memory issues, learning difficulties, and behavioral problems.

Environmental factors can also affect our mental health in the way they impact us psychologically. Your environment might raise or lower your stress levels, for instance. This can change your mental wellness overall, either serving to protect your psychological health or opening the door for mental illness to set in.

The world around you can help protect you from mental illness or it may be a catalyst for mental health issues to form.

April Snow, LMFT, explains that mental health can be impacted by anything in your environment, but the most notable factors include:

Aesthetics: Cluttered spaces can create feelings of overwhelm and anxiety, while tidy spaces can invoke a sense of calm. Having colors and objects in your environment that are meaningful can also boost mood says Snow.

Sensory: "The lighting, temperature, sounds, smells, and color palette of an environment are very important to how comfortable, relaxed, and safe you feel," Snow says. For example, harsh lighting and loud noises can lead to anxiety or agitation, while dark and cold spaces can lead to feeling unmotivated—especially in the winter.

People: Indirect or inconsistent communication, conflicts, and unreliable people in the environment can be very stressful to manage. Conversely, sharing a space with someone you trust, such as a partner or spouse, roommate, friend, or loved one, can create a sense of calm according to Snow.

Culture and values: "It's important for people to connect with others that share their culture and values and to be understood at a deeper level," Snow says. Otherwise, feelings of isolation and depression can arise.

Familiarity: If something in the environment, such as a difficult relationship or disorganization, reminds you of a difficult time, Snow says you may feel triggered by old feelings like anxiety. However, positive associations in the environment such as family keepsakes, photos, or familiar objects can boost mood and create a sense of connection.

Environmental Factors That Can Affect Your Psychology

Several things in our environment can impact our mental health, either directly or indirectly. These environmental factors exist where we live, work, go to school, and spend our time socially.

Home Environment

The home environment includes more than just your physical dwelling. "Our environment is a combination of both physical factors such as where you live and the people around you," says Rachelle Scott, MD, medical director of psychiatry at Eden Health, "both in your home but also on a wider community scale.

"Home-based environmental factors that can have a significant impact on mental health include

Climate. This includes the general temperatures where you live, the amount of sunlight you get, and your exposure to natural disasters. Climate change is also connected with greater mental health issues. The rising temperatures are associated with higher rates of aggression and violent suicides, for instance, with an increased frequency of disasters contributing to the development of depression, adjustment disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder.³

Crime levels. If you live in an area with a lot of crime, you may feel the impacts mentally. Crime levels tend to affect females more strongly, increasing their risk of depression and anxiety.⁴

Environmental racism. Environmental racism is defined as racial discrimination in environmental policy-making. It has been implicated as an important environmental factor that affects the mental health of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) individuals and communities.⁵

Pollution. Scott indicates that research shows increased rates of depression in more polluted areas. A 2019 review supports this, also indicating that long-term exposure to air pollution can increase one's risk of anxiety while even short-term exposure can increase suicide risk.⁶

Presence of toxins inside the home. This includes both cleaning products and mold. "The effect of mold, if present, in the home and higher rates of asthma as a result of increased pollutants themselves can also excrete mental health issues," says Scott.

Poverty. The social stress, stigma, and trauma of living in poverty can negatively impact the mental health of both children and adults which, in turn, can lead to employment issues and fragmented relationships.⁷ This creates a cycle that, for some, can be difficult to escape.

If you are having suicidal thoughts, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 988 for support and assistance from a trained counselor. If you or a loved one are in immediate danger.

Work Environment

More than half of our waking hours are spent on work or work-related activities according to the 2021 American Time Use Survey.⁸ That's why Scott says that our work environment plays a significant role in our mental health.

Several workplace factors can contribute to the development of mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, some of which include:

- Having a high-demand job
- High stress in your specific role
- Experiencing workplace bullying
- Imbalance of effort vs. rewards
- Low relational and procedural justice
- Low social support in the workplace

- Not feeling valued or respected
- Not having control over your job
- How a Toxic Work Environment Affects Your Mental Health
- School Environment

Children, adolescents, and college students often spend a lot of their days learning in class, studying, or completing homework assignments. The environment in which they do these activities can impact their mental health.

School-based environmental factors that can positively affect a student's mental well-being include.

- Having a sense of belonging
- Feeling connected to the school (e.g., "I am happy to be a part of this school!")
- Feeling safe at school, both emotionally and physically
- Presence of a school-based support system, including teachers, school social workers, and school psychologists
- Factors that can have a negative effect on a student's mental health are:¹⁰
- Being bullied
- Lack of access to instruction manuals
- Teachers not understanding how to deal with students who have mental health issues due to poor instruction or training
- Unclear or unfocused academic objectives

Social Environment

Scott also points to the fact that your social environment can affect your mental health. This includes socioeconomic elements such as race and ethnicity and a lack of social support—which can all have a profound influence on your ability to cope with stress.

For Gail Saltz, MD, clinical associate professor of psychiatry at the NY Presbyterian Hospital Weill-Cornell School of Medicine, the social environment plays a big role in mental health. "Having close, trusted, intimate others in your life is a significant positive factor for mental and physical health," she says.

Saltz indicates that this is true of a healthy marriage, a good circle of friends, and other important family relationships. "Lack of relationships, leading to loneliness causes depression and anxiety," she says, "while tumultuous and disturbing relationships leads to chronic stress and lower mood and higher anxiety."

Saltz adds that relationships with people who abuse substances increase the likelihood you will abuse substances, and growing up in a home with exposure to domestic violence, substance abuse, or emotional or physical abuse affect mental health detrimentally.

HOW PERCEPTION IMPACTS MENTAL HEALTH

It's easy to blame a toxic work environment, cluttered house, or rainy weather for your deteriorating mental health. But sometimes, your perception of the environment contributes to how you feel. For example, one study found that when people with depression perceived that they had poor social support, their symptoms, recovery, and social functioning were worse.

But the opposite is also true. If you perceive that you are satisfied with your life, your levels of overall life satisfaction will likely be higher.¹² This suggests that if there is some aspect of your environment that is negatively impacting your mental wellness, changing your perception of it may help you feel better.

"Trying to find appreciation in the environment, even if it's one positive thing, can help reframe your thoughts about your environment," says Scott. To accomplish this, practice gratitude and create a routine or habit to reduce the clutter around you. The latter helps "provide a sense of control in a situation where you feel like you don't have any control," Scott says.

Snow recommends focusing on what is working and supporting you in your current environment. She also suggests small changes to make the environment more soothing and familiar, such as organizing, adding photos, or painting. Also, process any emotions or frustrations that are present through journaling, movement, or talking with a friend or therapist. "Don't let the feelings build up," Snow says.

IDENTIFYING IF ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE IS NEEDED

Understanding that the environment plays a critical role in your mental health is the first step. The next step is to identify if a change is needed.

According to Snow, it's vital to notice the connection between how you're feeling and what triggers those emotions. "Then you can make small adjustments to your current environment to determine if that big change is really necessary," she says.

For example, if you live in a city and always feel overstimulated and anxious, Snow recommends engaging in more quiet activities at home. "If that doesn't change your mood, but you notice that every time you spend a weekend outside the city you feel relaxed, that's a sign that something needs to change," Snow explains.

Scott points out that picking up and moving from one environment to another permanently is not always an option for many of us. However, a temporary move from the city to the country, or perhaps closer to the water, is one way to test how your physical environment impacts your mood.

"If you notice that, for example, you experience less stress being outside of the city lights, there is less smog in the air and less noise for you to contend with and, as a result, you are sleeping better and thinking more clearly, then I would say you have some key evidence to support your decision," Scott says.

ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES THAT CAN IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH

If you want to improve your mental health, making changes to your environment can help. Snow recommends starting with the things you have control over and can accomplish relatively easily. Organize your space, for instance, or get a sound machine to cover up street noise.

Or maybe you live in an area where sunlight is scarce. This is "a real concern with

seasonal affective disorder (SAD)," says Scott. One solution is to implement bright light in your environment. This can help improve depression and anxiety, Scott says, especially during the long days of winter.

To make the most impact, begin with the room you spend most of your time in and arrange it in a way that is functional and free of clutter. If you work from home, for instance, start with your home office. If you spend a lot of time in your kitchen preparing meals, you might want to start there instead.

To improve your social environment, Saltz says that focusing on your social surroundings, improving and growing more intimate in some relationships, being vulnerable with those you can trust, and distancing yourself from toxic relationships that are negatively impacting mental health can all make a substantial difference.

WAYS TO MANAGE YOUR HOME ENVIRONMENT TO IMPROVE WELL-BEING AND PRODUCTIVITY



On average, people spend 90% of their time indoors, with much of that time at home. This statistic will likely increase with the growing trends of working and schooling remotely, and employers becoming more comfortable with hybrid work models. Knowing this, it's no surprise that many of us are seeking ways to improve the quality of our home environment, realizing the impact it has on our well-being and productivity.

Creating the ideal home environment can be overwhelming. And because every home is unique, there's no such thing as the perfect recipe. Fortunately, smart home technology exists today that helps monitor and control various indoor environmental quality elements, while also managing energy usage and costs. Evaluating your home's lighting, comfort level, air quality and sound pollution is a good place to start.

Lighting

Light affects our human physiology more than we think. It impacts our mood, alertness and even our body's internal clock, known as the circadian rhythm. Artificial light comes in different forms, including incandescent, fluorescent and light-emitting diode (LED). We're also exposed to other artificial light like smartphone screens and televisions displays throughout the day, which can disturb our general well-being.

Natural lighting is always best and should be mimicked in your home or office to improve sleep, boost focus and help reduce stress and anxiety. Lighting manufacturers are launching new products that can enhance spaces with little natural daylight and automate brightness and color to be consistent with regular daylight fluctuation. Motion sensors or smart lights can also be used to program your day and save energy, as well as create the right mood for different needs.

Thermal Comfort

Thermal comfort also plays an important role in our well-being. If your space is too hot or cold, or too humid or dry, it can impede alertness and productivity, as well as impact how well you sleep at night. Excessive humidity can also trigger health reactions like asthma, wheezing or itchy, red skin.

Although there are many factors that affect thermal comfort, air temperature and humidity both play a significant role. Installing a good and reliable HVAC system can help improve your environment and keep allergens and asthma triggers at bay.

You can also seamlessly control room temperature and humidity levels using energy-efficient smart thermostats. There are several smartphone apps that can connect you to your home's controls, giving you the power to monitor and regulate your home's environment from almost anywhere.

Air Quality

According to research from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), airborne pollutants can be in two to five times higher concentrations indoors than outdoors. Some sources of air pollution come from within our own homes – like pet dander and dust mites. Others can come from the outdoors. Regardless, it's critical to manage indoor air quality for better comfort and well-being.

To better understand the quality of the air in your home, new air quality monitoring technology can be used to detect, measure and track invisible elements like room temperature, humidity, carbon dioxide, certain volatile organic compounds (like odors or potentially harmful byproducts of furniture or cleaning supplies) and microscopic particulate matter from cooking, wildfires or vehicle traffic.

A better understanding of the causes of poor air quality helps inform you of the simple measures you can take to decrease air pollutants, like regular cleaning or changing the air filter in your furnace or central HVAC system. There are also portable air cleaners and purification systems on the market that help limit the spread of viruses and other airborne particles that can trigger allergies or asthma. To best protect your family and your investment, make sure the product claims are backed up by third-party research and consult the advice of indoor air experts.

Sound Pollution

The EPA also notes that "noise pollution adversely affects the lives of millions of people" and has a direct link to health. Disruptive noise in your home can lead to stress, high blood pressure, sleep disruption and lost productivity. Sound design matters, and taking steps to reduce or block out noise can help.

First, look for the causes of indoor disruptive noise, like a humming mechanical system or buzzing lights, and then talk to specialists who can offer tips. Check your window insulation and consider soundproofing your home if you can easily hear noise from the outside. There are also noise diffusers and absorbers ranging from basic to high-tech that you can install in your home.

The desire for healthy living has accelerated with the Covid-19 outbreak. Consider spending more time outdoors with a daily walk or bike ride. And, just as important, take control of your home space and better manage the elements like those I've listed to help improve your mood, well-being and productivity. There are more tools and technology than ever before to help ensure every home can provide a sustainable, efficient and quality indoor environment.

HOW TO CLEAN: 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

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.

Sponges and dish towels

A sponge can carry mold and thousands of germs and foodborne pathogens if it's not cleaned or stored properly.

Things you can do to kill germs on a sponge include:

- placing the sponge in the dishwasher with a high temperature and the drying cycle on

- wetting it and putting it in the microwave for 1–2 minutes
- squeezing it out well after every use and keeping it in a place that allows it to air dry
- Cloth dish towels can also harbor unhealthy microorganisms, even if they're only used for drying clean dishes. Wash them often with your machine temperature dial set to hot.

Cutting board

Never cut fruits or vegetables on the same cutting board you use to slice raw meat. Clean it with hot water and soap first.

Keeping veggies and raw meat separated will avoid cross-contamination and the possible spread of salmonella, E. coli, and other harmful bacteria.

It's a good idea to have two cutting boards: one for raw meat and one for fruits, vegetables, and everything else.

Countertops

Keep all surfaces cleaned and sanitized after you cook.

This extra step will help eliminate food bacteria such as Campylobacter, a common cause of diarrhea. This will also discourage insects from feasting on the leftovers left on the counter.

Household pests like cockroaches can carry a number of pathogens and can also trigger asthma and allergies in some people.

You can sanitize your countertops with bleach after wiping them down with soap and water. One teaspoon of chlorine bleach per quart of water will do the trick. This extra step will help kill any lingering pathogens.

Using bleach with chlorine will also help remove any virus material related to COVID-19. Ammonia will also work. Just don't use bleach and ammonia together, as they can combine to produce harmful chemicals.

Keep a lid on possible insect infestations by washing dishes and utensils immediately after eating, storing food in tightly sealed containers, and keeping trash in a container with a lid on it.

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.
- Rhinovirus, the main cause of the common cold, spreads easily when people touch contaminated surfaces and then touch their eyes, nose, or mouth. This is true of COVID-19, too.
- Rhinovirus and coronaviruses can live on surfaces for days, so clean your bathroom regularly.

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.

HOW TO GET PAINT OUT OF CARPET

Are you renovating a part of your home for the festive season? Many people engage in home improvement projects to prepare their abodes for Christmas and New Year's Eve. Painting walls is one of the common projects that work wonders in enhancing your rooms' overall look and feel.

Make you treat paint stains gently to keep your carpet fibres intact. However, if you spill a little paint on your luxurious carpets, tackle it as soon as possible or before it gets dry. Fortunately, oil and water-based paints can be removed easily with proper cleaning products and tools.

If you are preparing the rental property for rental inspection, hire professionals for an affordable end of lease cleaning Melbourne and secure your bond amount. They will spruce up your entire premises, including carpets, blinds, rugs and hard-to-reach areas.

Make sure you know new regulations for rental housing in Victoria if you are moving again to the leased property.

To get paint out of your carpet like a pro, have a look at the step-by-step guide and bring back the lost shine of your floor coverings using safe and sound products:

A Complete Guide To Remove Water-Based Paint From Carpets

It is always good to treat the paint stain when it is fresh as it becomes easy to remove. For water or latex-based paints, try the following tips:

Stock up on Necessary Cleaning Supplies

- A Butter knife
- Paper towels
- A Soft-bristled brush
- Dishwashing liquid
- An Iron
- A Vacuum machine
- Tips To Remove Fresh Paint Stains:
- Use a knife to Remove wet paint

Use the dull edge of your knife to lift away the fresh paint from your carpet. Do not rub or scrub the stain with paper or cloth because that will push the paint to embed deeper into the fibres

Blot the Paint Stain

Use a damp cloth or wet paper towel to blot the affected area that remains on the carpet. Do it with your gentle hands until the paint vanishes

You can also hire professional cleaners who offer end of lease cleaning in Melbourne if you are at the end of your tenancy for stress-free outcomes.

Tips To Remove Dried Paint Stains

Apply Solvent Solution

Mix a solution of hot water and dishwashing liquid in a bowl. Make your dried stain wet by applying a dipped soft-bristled brush on the affected area.

Scrape and Blot the Stain

In this step, use a butter knife and scrape the stain from your carpet fibres. Blot the stain with a wet cloth until it releases.

Re-apply the hot soapy water using a brush and remove the stain.

Use the power of Heat

If the hot and soapy water doesn't soften the stain, you can use a handheld cloth iron or steamer for better results. Put on a piece of cloth and put your heating tool on it. Do not place the iron or steamer directly on the carpet. Now, slowly scrap and blot the paint until it disappears.

Dry and Vacuum

Once the paint is removed, let the carpet to dry completely. After that, vacuum it to lift the loose debris embedded deep inside the fibres. You can also deep clean your carpet if you see dust, stains and mould if you are hosting a party at home

Tips To Eliminate Oil-Based Paint From Your Carpet

Oil-based paint is difficult to remove, and you need the following tools and products for desired result:

- A butter knife
- Paper Towels
- White Cotton rag
- A Steamer
- Paint Solvent
- Brush or an old toothbrush
- A Vacuum Cleaner

1. Lift and Blot Fresh Stain

If the paint stain is wet, use a butter knife to lift it from your carpet. Use steam to keep the paint moist when you are lifting it. Blot the area using a damp cloth.

Straighten a paperclip and utilise it to separate carpet fibres when blotting with a clean paper towel.

2. Scrape & Blot Dry Paint

If the oil paint is dry, use a butter knife to gently scrape away without causing any harm to the fibres. You can also use wet paper or a vacuum to collect the dry paint flakes. Make sure you use the right cleaning agent to remove foul odours from your carpets and other areas.

3. Apply the Solvent

After scraping, apply the paint removal solvent, such as paint thinner, to get rid of stains. Before that, test the product on a hidden carpet area to ensure it doesn't cause discolouration. Put a dab of the solvent on a cotton rag and blot the stained area until it transfers on the rag.

4. Rinse it Well

In this step, mix hot water and mild dishwashing liquid in a bowl. Dip a brush and scrub the area with gentle hands. Damp a clean rag into the water and rinse the area. Blot away excess water using paper towels

5. Air-Dry

Let the carpet dry completely before vacuuming to restore its shine and beauty. Use a HEPA-filtered vacuum machine as it can fetch pollen, tiny dust particles and allergens with ease and this will help you reduce pollen allergies in your home. If the oil-based paint stain persists, hire professional carpet cleaners in Melbourne who can offer you steam cleaning service to remove all types of stubborn stains, grime and grease without causing discolouration.

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