



Ten Ways to a Healthy Home!

An [ACN Latitudes](#) Report

Whether you live in an apartment, dormitory or mansion, your living space should be a sanctuary from the rest of the world. Some basic must-dos toward achieving a healthier home environment are highlighted here.

▲ Purify your air

Clean air in the home can help strengthen the immune system, reduce allergies and asthma attacks, and allow for better sleep.

For starters, do not use standard air fresheners or scented candles. They contain toxins and can contribute to numerous illnesses, in addition to aggravating the central nervous system.

Sometimes it's hard to convince family members or friends of this, so keep this article ([here](#)) from the Environmental Working Group handy and share it with others. Even essential oils can be troublesome for sensitive individuals, so take care in selecting those if you wish to use them.



Quality filters and air purifiers are the best way to ensure clean home air. (Of course don't forget to open the windows at times to bring fresh air in.) Environmental physicians often recommend air purifiers by [Austin](#) or [Faust](#), but there are many brands available. Look for ones that will address the issues you are facing, and be prepared to invest in more expensive models for better quality.



▲ Be careful selecting and using plastics

It's impossible to avoid all plastics in our homes, but watch out for those containing bisphenol A (BPA). BPA is an "endocrine disruptor" that creates confusion within the endocrine system. It is widely used in baby products, nail polish, toys, dental sealants, and the lining of cans, to name just a few.

In the last decade, significant progress has been made in eliminating BPA in products, but there's still a long way to go. Fortunately, an international movement is underway to ban its use, and product labelling has improved. Look for items labelled BPA-free.



The [Environmental Working Group](#) suggests avoiding polycarbonate plastics; these are rigid and transparent, and often used for water bottles and food storage. They can release BPA, especially when used with hot food or liquids. They are often marked with PC or the number 7. Cloudy plastic does not have BPA. A move by you toward glass and ceramic products is a positive step.

Currently, almost all linings in cans contain BPA, so it is best to limit consumption of canned foods unless noted as BPA-free.

Vinyl products are marked PVC or with the number 3. PVC is used to make plastic more flexible. It was banned in 2009 but products like shower curtains and raincoats made before then contain it.

If you must use plastics:

- Don't microwave foods in them.

- Don't put them on the bottom rack of the dishwasher because the heat will degrade them. Once they become scratched or worn out they can leach chemicals more easily. When they are showing signs of wear, toss them.
- Don't let babies and children chew on plastic toys or products. Avoid soft plastic toys; look for natural items.
- When microwaving food, cover with an unbleached paper towel, not plastic wrap.



▲ Check for fire retardants before purchase

Polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDE) are commonly used as flame retardants. They are added to many fabrics, plastics, mattresses, vehicles, furniture, and electronics. While production of specific PBDEs has been stopped in the USA, some production continues. PBDEs are suspected of affecting learning, memory, and behavior, as well as thyroid function.

Foam furniture often contains fire retardants. Make sure cushions stay covered, and replace or repair if the cover is damaged enough to expose foam. Chemicals from fire retardants make their way into dust, so be sure to vacuum furniture and floors frequently with a machine that has a HEPA filter.



Carpet padding frequently has fire retardants as well. If you are removing or replacing a carpet, section off the room with hanging barriers to keep the dust contained within that room, and then clean the floor thoroughly. Some carpet installers offer this additional service. Select new carpet and padding carefully to ensure it is eco-friendly.

When looking for new furniture, investigate whether products contain PBDEs, because it is not usually included on labels. In Europe, consumers can look for alternative fire retardants in soft foam, like ammonium polyphosphates. Standard fire retardants have been phased out in Denmark so [IKEA](#) (Danish) furniture is worth looking into. You can also search the Internet for "PBDE-free furniture."

For more info on fire retardants, see this site [here](#) by environmental pioneer Arlene Blum.



▲ Focus on water quality

It's frustrating that with all our scientific advances, we still have to worry if the water from home faucets is safe. It's a good idea to get a free municipal report on your local water so you know what you're dealing with and what type of filtration you may need. Private wells should be tested regularly.

Carbon filters can help remove typical contaminants in tap water, such as lead and some byproducts from the local water treatment process. They can't eliminate certain contaminants though, such as perchlorate and arsenic. Reverse osmosis and distillation are the gold standard; they remove almost all contaminants, but also strip minerals from the water, so you should plan to add minerals back into your water or diet if using these methods. *Remember to use your filtered water for cooking, not just for drinking.*

Consider a whole-house water filter to remove basic contaminants, and/or filters at-the-site. Check with the manufacturer for details on whole house filters to be sure you receive the features you are looking for. Once you have your filtration plan in place, change filters regularly. [Individual filters](#) can be fitted for the shower and tub.

After years of people toting plastic water bottles everywhere, the best practice is to avoid bottled water in plastic bottles. Instead, use a stainless steel bottle (make sure it doesn't have a plastic liner) and fill it with filtered water from home.



▲ Select safe household cleaners

Based on products found in the supermarket aisles, you'd assume there's a wide array of safe cleaners to choose from. Unfortunately, the practice of greenwashing abounds. This means that companies claim their product is "natural," "non-toxic," "green," or "enviro-friendly" when in fact those terms are meaningless because they are not subject to certification. It's wise to look for products from companies such as Seventh Generation, or look for items certified by Green Seal or EcoLogo.



Want to make your own cleaners for the home? Here are some recipes. They can make a fun project to do with your kids, while teaching them safe practices. Standard cleaning products are often quite toxic.

These are the basics to make your own cleansers:

- baking soda
- white distilled vinegar
- pure essential oils from natural food store
- liquid castile soap (natural food store)
- pumice stone (hardware store)
- olive oil
- earth-friendly dishwashing liquid
- 32-ounce spray bottle

❑ *Toilet Bowl Buster*

Ingredients and supplies

- ¼ cup baking soda
- 2 to 3 drops of eucalyptus essential oil
- a squirt of Earth-friendly dishwashing liquid
- ½ cup white distilled vinegar
- pumice stone (pumice won't scratch porcelain)

Flush toilet, then follow these steps:

1. Add the first three ingredients to bowl.
2. Swish with toilet brush.
3. Add vinegar and let sit 15 minutes or longer (overnight if needed); flush.
4. Using rubber gloves, take the pumice stone and scrub the bowl ring and any stains under the rim and around the bowl.
5. Swish with brush and flush.

Repeat all steps if toilet hasn't been cleaned in a while. Use the All-Purpose Green Cleaner (below) to clean the rest of the toilet.

☐ *All Purpose Green Cleaner*

Ingredients and supplies

- 32 oz. spray bottle
 - water
 - white distilled vinegar
 - lemongrass essential oil
 - eco-friendly dishwashing liquid
1. Fill bottle half way with water.
 2. Add vinegar almost to the top, leaving space for shaking.
 3. Add 10-15 drops of lemongrass essential oil
 4. Add 2-3 drops of eco-friendly dishwashing liquid
 5. Cap and shake. There should be a thin line of foamy bubbles at the top — but not too many.
 6. Label container clearly.

Use on windows, mirrors, floors, some carpet/ upholstery stains (test first), chrome, as a rinse after cleaning with baking soda, to clean outside of toilet.

☐ *Simple Earth Cleanser*

Ingredients and supplies

- 16 oz. container with hole(s) in lid
 - large container of baking soda
 - peppermint essential oil, or another oil of your choice
1. Fill container half way with baking soda.
 2. Add 3-5 drops essential oil. Cap the container and covering holes in lid, shake well.
 3. Fill container rest of way with baking soda.
 4. Cap, cover holes, and shake to mix.
 5. Label container clearly.

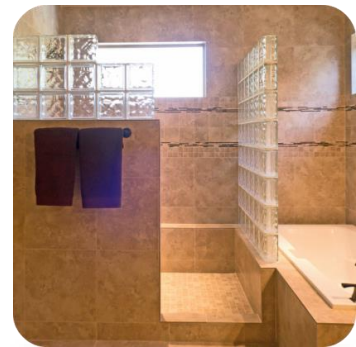
Use on sinks, counters, tubs and tile, appliances, dishes, pots/pans (not aluminum!). Rinse away gritty baking soda residue with the All-Purpose Green Cleaner or water.

Want more ideas? [See here](#).



▲ Take mold precaution and remediation seriously

While only a handful of mold varieties release toxins into the air, steps should be taken to prevent and remediate molds in general. Mold has been blamed for some respiratory disorders, learning problems, fatigue, headache and other neurological conditions. Studies to support health claims may be scant, but case reports of injury from mold are numerous.



If you spot mold in your home, chances are there is unseen mold as well. Mold thrives on moisture, so in addition to finding and repairing any source of a water leak, dehumidifiers may be needed to keep humidity levels at 30 – 60%. Be sure bathrooms are vented, and wipe down wet surfaces.

It's very important to follow proper steps in removing mold so it does not spread throughout the house or cause exposure to the person cleaning it.

The points below are compiled from material by the Environmental Protection Agency. If your home has a mold problem, you may need to consult a certified mold remediation expert for advice, and moving may be advisable in some cases.

- Fix leaks and seepage. If water is entering the house from the outside, your options range from simple landscaping to extensive excavation and waterproofing. (The ground should slope away from the house.) Water in the basement can result from the lack of gutters or a water flow toward the house. Water leaks in pipes or around tubs and sinks can provide a place for mold to grow.
- Put a plastic cover over dirt in crawl spaces to prevent moisture from coming in from the ground. Be sure crawl spaces are well-ventilated.

- Use exhaust fans in bathrooms and kitchens to remove moisture to the outside (not into the attic). Vent your clothes dryer to the outside.
- Turn off certain appliances (such as humidifiers or kerosene heaters) if you notice moisture on windows and other surfaces.
- Use dehumidifiers and air conditioners, especially in hot, humid climates, to reduce moisture in the air, but be sure that the appliances themselves don't become sources of biological pollutants. Reduce indoor humidity to 30-60% to decrease mold growth.
- Raise the temperature of cold surfaces where moisture condenses. Use insulation or storm windows. (A storm window installed on the inside works better than one installed on the outside.) Open doors between rooms (especially doors to closets which may be colder than the rooms) to increase circulation. Circulation carries heat to the cold surfaces. Increase air circulation by using fans and by moving furniture from wall corners to promote air and heat circulation. Be sure that your house has a source of fresh air and can expel excessive moisture from the home.
- Pay special attention to carpet on concrete floors. Carpet can absorb moisture. Use area rugs that can be taken up and washed often. In certain climates, if carpet is to be installed over a concrete floor, it may be necessary to use a vapor barrier (plastic sheeting) over the concrete and cover that with sub-flooring (insulation covered with plywood) to prevent a moisture problem.
- Evaporative coolers used in the Southwest can encourage the growth of mold. In other hot regions, the use of air conditioners that cool the air too quickly may prevent the air conditioners from running long enough to remove excess moisture from the air. The types of construction and weatherization for different climates can lead to different problems and solutions.
- Clean and dry any damp or wet building materials and furnishings within 24-48 hours to prevent mold growth.

Although a substance may look like mold, a positive determination of whether it is mold or not can be made only by an expert and may require laboratory analysis for final confirmation. For about \$50, some microbiology laboratories can tell you whether a sample sent to them on a clear strip of sticky household tape is mold or simply a substance that resembles it. [Editor: Air samples can also be taken.]

If you have insulated air ducts and the insulation gets wet or moldy, it cannot be effectively cleaned and should be removed and replaced. Do not install carpeting where there is a perpetual moisture problem. Molds can grow on wood, paper, carpet, and foods whenever moisture is present. Check the epa.gov website for more details. **For info on mold in schools [see here](#).**



▲ Leave those shoes at the door!

Here's an easy one. Make it a habit to take shoes off in the entryway so you don't track germs and allergens into the home. Shoe removal is a common practice in many countries and it is finally catching on in the West. It's not strange, it's smart.

Did you know [research](#) by *Good Morning America* found that shoes have more bacteria than toilet seats? Ugh. The seats usually have 1000 bacteria or less, and shoes are in the millions! They recommend removing shoes, and if guests come they can be offered clean slippers or socks. In some cases you may need to let guests enter with shoes and clean up later, depending on their comfort level in removing their shoes.



▲ Tough love with pets

It is not uncommon for families to recognize that someone in the home has sensitivities to a cat, dog, or other animal, and yet the pet remains in the house.

An allergist can test for reactions to dander and help you pinpoint any concerns.

The American Kennel Club lists dogs that produce the least dander, making them better choices for those with allergies.



While they can't promise that people with allergies won't have a problem with these breeds, they recommend:

1. Bedlington Terrier
2. Bichon Fries
3. Chinese Crested
4. Irish water spaniel
5. Kerry blue terrier
6. Poodles
7. Portuguese
8. Schnauzers
9. Soft coated wheaten terrier
10. Xoloitzcuintli (not a typo!)

When people have cat allergies, they are reacting to a protein in the skin, saliva, and urine. When a cat scratches or licks itself, the allergens are released and cling to the carpet, furniture, air ducts, or walls. The allergens can last for months, even after the cat is out of the home.

Someone with a mild allergy to cats may be able to get by with regular cleaning of the home, furniture, air ducts, and linens. Others react to even a small amount of cat allergen.

Some people may find a particular type of cat less troublesome than others. But people's reactions vary so much that it is difficult to make any generalizations.

It has been suggested that [Siberian cats](#) may be the best bet for those with cat allergies.

Some people are reactive to the type of kitty litter used. Look for ones with natural scents or unscented, and try to minimize litter dust. It might seem like a simple choice, but check out this comprehensive advice on kitty litter from the [ASPCA](#).

Since dander and allergens are circulated throughout a home, a good filtration system is important. *When a child's health is significantly affected, efforts to relocate the pet should be considered. Above all, the pet should not sleep in the child's bedroom*



▲ Take care with renovations

You can unwittingly bring toxins into the home with remodeling efforts. Pressed wood cabinets, glue used on flooring, new carpets and pads, furniture with ScotchGuard, paints with volatile organic compounds (VOCs) . . . plenty of dangers lurk within new materials.

Don't count on sales people to know if a product is toxin-free.

The good news is, nowadays if you ask for paint with no VOCs you can easily get it. The term has become common knowledge. But that's not always the case when discussing other modifications. For example, a carpet sales person may be quick to ensure you that a specific product is natural and "safe enough for a baby," because it's a line of recycled carpet or the manufacturer put a baby on the sales flyer. Yet, when you check the spec sheet, you might find it is highly treated or made with toxic fibers. Here are some sources for carpeting information: [Carpet and Rug Institute Green Label](#); [EPA on carpet](#).

Take time to investigate each item thoroughly, from kitchen to bathroom, before deciding on renovation materials. Be sure cabinets and other wood-type products are formaldehyde free.



▲ Reduce radiation

What level of exposure to electromagnetic frequencies (EMFs) is safe? No one knows, and the best guess is that current standards are not acceptable and will be adjusted in the future. What *is known* is that young children and those with compromised health are the most vulnerable to negative effects of EMFs. Efforts should be taken by everyone to reduce unnecessary exposure.

Use of a landline with plugin phones throughout the house is safer than using mobile phones and cell phones. Yet, so few



restrict their phones to landlines alone that it's often a special order with the phone company to achieve this.

Similarly, using plugin internet connections is safer than having WiFi in the house, though the norm is now WiFi.

Some health organizations are pushing for a ban on WiFi in schools, and we hope these efforts succeed. The levels in schools are much higher than in a typical home, and students and staff are exposed for several hours each school day.

At home, make it a habit to turn the WiFi off at night, and follow cell phone [safety measures](#).

Radon, a natural occurring radioactive gas, is often overlooked but is a leading cause of lung cancer. Most people fail to test for radon though it is easy and inexpensive. Use this guide [here](#) to learn more about radon and how to test for it and remediate when needed.

Wishing you a happy and healthy home!

www.Latitudes.org

