

“SEVEN STEPS TO A HEALTHY HOME”

We all want to take good care of our families. We try to eat healthy foods. We take our children to the doctor for regular checkups. We try our best to protect our family from accidents and illness. We also want to live in a safe neighborhood.

But many of us have hidden dangers in our home that can affect our children's health. Just how do we track down those hidden dangers? Read on to help you better understand how to make your home a healthy home.

Not all of these steps can be controlled by design, construction, or remodeling. How people actually live in a home affects how healthy it is.

Step 1: Control Moisture — Water and excessive humidity support the growth of mold, insects, rodents, and dust mites. Keeping a home dry helps control mold and pests, and it discourages dust mites.

Relative humidity inside the home should be maintained between 40 and 60 percent. When cooking or showering, use exhaust fans or open a window if the outside air is dry. If you have a clothes dryer, make sure it is vented to the outside. Increase airflow in problem areas such as closets and behind furniture on outside walls.

The three most important sources of moisture that require control are rainwater, groundwater, and plumbing. Repair leaking roofs, walls, doors, or windows. Cover windows well if they leak.

Step 2: Keep It Clean — A clean house is a healthier house. Clean your home often. Dust provides food for mold, insects, rodents, and dust mites. In older homes, the dust may contain lead, which is harmful to your children. Clutter makes it difficult to clean, and in many cases, it may serve as food for pests. Keep the clutter down. Store your belongings in a container such as a chest, plastic box, or even a cardboard box rather than in piles or stacks. Keeping a home clean helps control mold and pests. Smooth and cleanable surfaces make it easier to remove dust. Control the dust and pollen that comes in at each entry by using washable throw rugs.

Step 3: Keep It Ventilated — Ventilation provides a way to remove pollutants and to control humidity. Windows that open and exhaust fans that run help control pollutants. When outdoor air is brought into the home, ideally it is filtered to remove pollens and other outdoor pollutants.

Step 4: Keep It Free of Combustion By-Products — Combustion by-products such as carbon monoxide, sulfur oxides, nitrogen oxides, and soot should not be in a healthy home. Furnaces, water heaters, and fireplaces that burn fuel must vent to the outside. Stoves, ovens, and cook-tops that burn fuel must be used with fans that vent the combustion by-products to the outside. Never use the kitchen stove or oven to heat your home because they release sulfur oxides and nitrogen oxides. Never warm up a car in an attached garage because of the carbon monoxide it releases. You should install a carbon monoxide alarm that will make a loud noise when CO levels become too high. If the alarm goes off, get out of the house and call 911 from a phone outside your home. Don't go back home until all problems have been fixed.

Step 5: Keep It Pest Free — Pests can lead to allergic reactions and to the use of pesticides.

Food and water attract pests. Controlling food and water helps to minimize pests. Sealing the points where pests enter the home can also minimize pests. A clean house minimizes the number of pests that are attracted. If you open the windows, window screens that are in good condition are a must. If you must use pesticides, use the least toxic one. Make sure any pesticides that you do not use are either destroyed, shared with someone else, or stored safely away from young children.

Step 6: Keep It Free of Chemicals — No environment can be totally free of chemicals, but we can control our exposure. We can select household materials that don't smell or release chemicals. We also can control the cleaning compounds, pesticides, oil or alkyd based paints, and solvents that we use in our homes. It is best **not** to store these products inside the home. These products have information on them about how to safely dispose of them. Many municipalities operate household chemical disposal programs.

Step 7: Keep It Comfortable — A comfortable temperature and humidity level in a home allows for the windows to be closed if needed. Too hot or too cold is usually uncomfortable. When a home is uncomfortably humid (above 60 percent RH), particularly in the summer and fall, it may require a humidifier or air conditioner. If you have windows that open and fans that run, they can help to ventilate the home when outside weather conditions are favorable. If the home is too dry (less than 20 percent RH), you can increase the humidity through normal household activities like cooking, showering, laundry, etc. A humidifier is typically not recommended because people tend to over humidify.

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