

Home, clean home



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You may not realise it, but many common household items expose you to a cocktail of toxic chemicals, every day.

BECAUSE we don't know the long-term effects of this exposure to multiple chemicals, the safest option is to reduce the chemical load in our homes. Here's how:

1. Smudging

This Native American practice of purifying a room using the smoke of herbs is said to rid a space of negative energy – and it's a belief supported by science, as burning sage and other herbs releases negative ions, which research shows are linked to a more positive mood.

When you move to a new home, or after an argument, use smudging to cleanse the air. First, open a window. Place the sacred herbs, such as white sage, in an abalone shell (smudge sticks and abalone shells are available online) – or a

clay bowl, and light them from a candle or with a wooden match. Once the herbs fire, gently blow out the flame and allow the material to smoulder in the shell. Breathe in a little of the smoke and waft it over your hands, head and heart, then leave it in the shell in a safe spot and allow it to burn so the room fills with the fragrant smoke. Once this is done, take the ashes outside and place them on the earth as they're considered the remnants of your cleansing ritual and so should not be kept.

2. Feng shui

Feng shui basically means the chi – or energy – of your home or business should flow as freely as a river, without encountering blockages. One of the most basic things you can do is clear away clutter to give the chi free passage. However,

feng shui is a highly complex art, so the ideal is to obtain expert advice. Accredited consultants can be sourced from The Association of Feng Shui Consultants (www.afsc.org.au). Members are qualified professionals committed to the Association's Code of Ethics. The book *Feng Shui for Dummies; Move Your Stuff, Change Your Life* is another excellent resource.

3. Consult a building biologist

An emerging and rapidly developing field in Australia, building biology began in Germany in the 1970s in response to the number of sick "energy-efficient" buildings created to conserve energy costs during the oil crisis. The science investigates health hazards present in the built environment, which can be anything from chemicals in building materials and household products to lead, dust, noxious gases, allergens, mould, electromagnetic fields, and geopathic stress. A good starting point is the book *Healthy Home, Healthy Family* by building biologist Nicole Bijlsma (www.buildingbiology.com.au).

4. Go chemical-free

As each cosmetic or personal care item is due for replacement, switch to chemical-free alternatives. At the very least, choose products that are free from "the dirty dozen" ingredients (www.davidsuzuki.org/publications/downloads/2010/whats-inside-shoppers-guide.pdf). Avoid cleansing and facewash products that contain microbeads - the words "scrub", "exfoliator", "polypropylene" and "polyethylene" are the red flags - as these tiny beads wash into waterways where they absorb toxic chemicals and are ingested by wildlife. (www.beatthemicrobead.org/en/science).

5. Install water filters

If you have concerns about your water supply (e.g. a strong smell of chlorine), consider installing water filters on kitchen and bathroom taps. Quality filters are expensive, so look for the certification, such as Australian standard AS/NZS4348, which covers a range of contaminants.

6. Skip room fresheners

Replace air fresheners and scented candles with essential oils - but don't burn them. Instead, use a cool mist diffuser, as heating essential oils can damage their therapeutic qualities. Study after study is highlighting the potential dangers of commercial air fresheners and scented candles, which actually do nothing to improve the quality of the air: all they do is mask odours. In particular, research has warned that plug-in air fresheners produce "considerable" levels of formaldehyde, a known human carcinogen most closely linked with cancers of the nose and throat.

At a lesser level, formaldehyde can also cause sore throats, coughs, scratchy eyes, and nosebleeds.

7. Purge plastics

Choose wooden toys. Gradually replace plastic food storage containers with glass. Take your own containers when you shop to avoid plastic containers. Buy loose produce instead of prepacked. Use beeswax wraps in place of cling film or aluminium. They are expensive, but making your own - using certified organic cotton - is easy. Instructions abound on the web. Recycle supermarket shopping bags (still used in online shopping) and other plastics such as bread bags that can't go into the kerbside recycling bin. Details of collection points are available on www.redcycle.net.au/redcycle. Terracycle has a free program for recycling mailing satchels (www.terracycle.com.au/en-AU/brigades/ mailing-satchel-brigade).

8. Use bicarb in the bathroom

A paste of bicarbonate of soda and vinegar is just as effective for cleaning baths and sinks as commercial cream cleansers. Adding a few drops of eucalyptus or tea tree oil gives the mix disinfectant properties. Clean windows with this mix: 2 cups warm water, 1 cup vinegar, 1 teaspoon eco-friendly detergent or liquid Castile soap, and several drops of peppermint essential oil.

9. Love your laundry

Soap nuts are an effective laundry detergent: simply put five or six nuts in a muslin or nut-milk bag with a drawstring top and soak in warm water for five minutes before adding the nuts and soaking water to the washing machine. They work best if the machine is not over filled. Remove soap nuts when the cycle is finished, and let them dry. They can be reused until they start to break down. Avoid dryer sheets, and instead buy pure wool dryer balls, which reduce drying time by about one-quarter. One function of dryer sheets is to reduce static: pinning a couple of safety pins to a wool dryer ball has the same effect. For their other function as fabric softener, substitute white vinegar.

10. Sleep safely

Down-filled duvets and pillows are no longer the gold standard in bedding. In some countries, the soft layers of feathers closest to the goose's skin may be plucked from the birds while they're still alive (www.peta.org/features/down-investigation/), and cleaning those feathers for use in bedding may involve sterilising them with formaldehyde, bleaching and spraying with chemical anti-allergens. Safest bedding options are organic wool or cotton filling for duvets and pillows, along with natural rubber and shredded latex for the latter. Other future possibilities are spelt hull, buckwheat husk and kapok pod. For sheets and towels, look for organic cotton or organic bamboo. ✨

Nature & Health loves ...

Resparkle 100 percent and certified organic laundry powder (www.resparkle.com.au), EcoStore's fragrance-free dishwasher tablets, which contain no nasty phosphates, triclosan or SLS (www.ecostore.co.nz), and certified organic, probiotic-based Anywhere Anytime cleaner, to fight harmful bacteria, minus harsh chemicals. www.probioticsolutions.com.au



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