



The Environmental Defence Guide to **Cleaning & Indoor Air**



Cleaning should be about fighting grime, not fighting for your health. The problem: a lot of popular cleaning products can impact your indoor air quality through a group of chemicals called volatile organic compounds – or VOCs for short, Environmental Defence [research](#) has shown.

A hazard to human health, VOC exposure can cause eye, nose, mouth and throat irritation, headaches, dizziness and even skin problems and asthma. When expecting mothers are exposed, the unborn child's brain development can even be affected.

That's why it makes sense to be mindful of your indoor air quality and reduce the risk from VOCs when you clean your home. Here are a few tips to keep your house sparkling while protecting the air inside your home.

CLEANING TIPS

Choose green products: Environmental Defence's research has shown that green cleaning products release significantly less VOCs into indoor air. But don't fall for products that claim they are green on the label. Make sure to choose products with fully disclosed ingredients or that feature a certified green label like EcoLogo or Cradle to Cradle. You can also easily make your own cleaning products—see below.

Keep your home well ventilated while cleaning: Always keep windows open or ventilation fans running during and after cleaning (for 30 minutes to an hour), if the fans vent to the outdoors. This is especially important if you live in a condo or an apartment. Better air circulation will keep harmful VOC levels from building up.

Keep children away when using cleaning products: It's a good idea to keep children, especially babies, out of the room when using products. Crawling children have their mouths closer to the floor, so they will inhale more VOCs if emissions are released from products used in mopping.

Protect your skin with gloves: Wearing gloves doesn't stop VOCs from entering your lungs, but they protect your skin from harsh chemicals that are present in many cleaning products.

DIY

EASY-TO-MAKE CLEANING PRODUCTS

One easy way to keep VOC levels low is to simply make your own cleaning products. It's simple and inexpensive. Almost all you need to clean your windows, floors, toilet bowls, etc. can be made with some common kitchen items, a bit of water and a little elbow grease. Baking soda is a great deodorizer and surface cleaner; vinegar helps kill bacteria, mould, and viruses; and lemon juice can cut grease when cleaning windows. Here are some homemade non-toxic cleaning recipes to get you started.

Ingredients: baking soda, vinegar, vegetable oil, lemon juice

- **All-purpose cleaner** — Dissolve 4 tbsp baking soda in one quart warm water, or use baking soda on a damp sponge.
- **Surface cleaner** — Mix together vinegar and salt.
- **Floor cleaner** — A few drops of vinegar in a bucket of hot water. For wood floors, mix a one to one ratio of vegetable oil and vinegar into a solution and apply a thin coat. Rub in well.
- **Carpet cleaner** — Sprinkle baking soda liberally over dry carpet, wait at least 15 minutes before vacuuming.

- **Furniture polish** — Mix two parts vegetable oil with one part lemon juice. Apply and polish with a soft cloth.
- **Window and glass cleaner** — Wash windows with a mix equal parts of white vinegar and warm water. Dry with a soft cloth.
- **Lime and mineral deposit remover** — Hard lime deposits around faucets can be softened for easy removal by covering the deposits with vinegar-soaked paper towels. Leave the paper towels on for about one hour before cleaning.
- **Toilet bowl cleaner** — Sprinkle baking soda into the bowl, then drizzle vinegar and scrub with a toilet brush.
- **Tub and tile cleaner** — Apply vinegar full strength to a sponge and wipe surface first. Next, use baking soda as you would a scouring powder. Rub with a damp sponge and rinse thoroughly with clean water.
- **Drain cleaners** — Pour 1/2 cup baking soda down the drain. Add 1/2 cup white vinegar and cover the drain if possible. Let set for a few minutes, then pour a kettle of water down the drain to flush. (Do not use this method if any commercial drain cleaner is still present).

FIND OUT MORE

Learn more about toxic chemicals and how they can affect your indoor air by checking out the Environmental Defence report: "The Dirty Truth: How toxic cleaning products are putting Canadians at risk."

You can find the full report here:
environmentaldefence.ca/dirtytruth



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