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## Clean and green

Using nontoxic cleaners and environmentally safe building products should help you breathe easier at home

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Everywhere you look you can find medical advice on how to live right -- eat healthily, exercise regularly, avoid smoking. But few of these prescriptions for the healthy lifestyle involve the place where you'll be doing much of that living: your home.

Just as you can watch what you eat and do to improve your health, there are several steps, many of them simple, that you can take to make that home a healthier environment.

Shari Lovold, 47, has watched her son Cody, now 15, struggle with allergies, ear infections and asthma since he was a toddler. About a year ago, Cody's asthma became worse and the Crawfordsville mother read a book about cleaning without chemicals that revolutionized her life.

She relies on vinegar and baking soda to keep their home clean. Their laundry detergent and their food are organic.

And now Lovold's family has gone one step further: They're building what they believe to be the first "green" house in Montgomery County. The four-bedroom home will have no carpet, no paints with toxic chemicals, no formaldehyde.

"I realized our lives are filled with chemicals. . . . The chemicals have got to be doing something," says Lovold, who says that her first goal was to have "a healthier house." "It's just been an amazing journey to do all this stuff."

You don't have to start from scratch as Lovold is doing, however, to make your home healthy. Here are some tips:

### Keep things clean and dry

"The biggest pollutants in a home are dust, mold and mildew, so anything you can do to reduce those are going to be beneficial for your breathing," says Christy Osborn, a board member with Ecology House of Indianapolis, a local organization that educates people about green living and sustainability.

Don't put carpets in areas that can get wet, such as laundry rooms, kitchens and bathrooms, says Rebecca Morley, executive director of the National Center for Healthy Housing, a nonprofit research organization based in Columbia, Md. Place fans in bathrooms to draw out the moisture.

Direct water away from the home by placing downspouts so they flow away from the foundation, says Morley.

Place dehumidifiers in places that are likely to develop mold, such as basements, says Loren Robertson, assistant commissioner of the Indiana State Department of Health.

Routine maintenance of your home can also cut down on mold, says M. Deborah Millette of the National Center for Environmental Health at the Centers for Disease Control. Address any leaks immediately to prevent water from entering the home.

This may also ward off the development of cracks and crevices that would provide entry for pests such as cockroaches and mice, whose presence can exacerbate allergies and

asthma. If your home does have cracks, seal them up as soon as possible.

Use a mat to keep dust, pesticides, lead or anything else you might bring in on shoes outside the home, Morley says. Or you can just take your shoes off inside the house.

If you're susceptible to dust, rethink your window decorations. Instead of drapes, which can collect dust, use window film, Osborn says.

### **Choose safe home materials**

If you're redoing your home, choose the materials you use carefully. Many commonly used materials, from carpet to particleboard, are guilty of off-gassing, shedding chemicals such as formaldehyde that could have an impact on your health.

"Those things will live and breathe and emit fumes for years," says Randy Gray, a co-owner of Green Way Supply Inc., a Downtown retailer and wholesaler of green and healthy materials.

Green Way Supply offers a range of woods that have no formaldehyde for use in floors and cabinetry as well as carpets. If you prefer linoleum floors, consider all-natural Marmoleum, which can repel bacteria. The store also offers paints free of volatile organic compounds, and natural household cleaners.

Because a lot of wallpapers contain vinyl, which can also emit harmful vapors, go for a different treatment when you're decorating walls, Osborn says.

### **Check for toxins in your home**

Everyone who lives in a home built before 1978 should test for lead, says Janet McCabe, executive director of Indianapolis-based Improving Kids' Environment. Local health departments offer free lead checks, but you can also do it yourself with swabs from the hardware store.

Dust from lead paint can also cause problems. So check the dust from sills and floors near old wooden framed windows to make sure it's lead-free. Floors around doors and cabinets and staircases are also potential problem areas, says McCabe.

If you have bare spots in your yard, sample the soil to make sure there's no residual lead from the days of leaded gasoline, says McCabe. If you do find lead, plant grass because if the area is bare, you may track that lead-contaminated soil into your home.

Install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.

Test your home for radon, which you have no other way of detecting, says Robertson. Radon causes about 21,000 lung cancer deaths a year. A radon testing kit is about \$10 at hardware stores.

Perhaps the easiest way to keep toxins out of your home? Don't let anyone smoke in it, says Morley.

"That's probably one of the top contaminants you have in the home environment," she says.

### **Read labels on cleaning**

and pesticide products

You may bring some of the worst toxins into the house in the interest of conquering dirt or pests.

Many experts on healthy living advocate a back-to-basics approach for cleaning, replacing the bleaches, ammonias and other chemicals with baking soda scrubs and vinegar counter cleaners.

Several natural cleaners are available on the market, including the Method line at Target.

"Look at the products and see what's in them," advises Morley. "If it has a laundry list of

ingredients, think about whether you want to introduce those into your homes."

While designed to kill unwanted guests in our homes, pesticides may not be all that harmless to the legitimate residents, experts warn.

Instead of randomly spraying, concentrate on integrated pest management, says the CDC's Millette.

Figure out how the pest entered your home in the first place and address that. Then make sure you're not leaving out food (including pet food) and water that might make your home that much more inviting.