

4 tips for a healthier home

August 5 2019, by Len Canter



Simple steps can help you protect your home from health dangers big and small.

Here are four tips to get you started:

It can't be said often enough: Proactively change the batteries in smoke and carbon monoxide alarms. Don't wait until you hear the chirping signal. Set a yearly reminder, such as on your birthday. Also, test the devices monthly as they can wear out over time.

Dirt and neglect can erode your HVAC (heating, ventilation, and [air-conditioning](#)) system's efficiency and lead to failure. Changing filters as needed keeps dirt from building up. Check them monthly, especially during high-usage winter and [summer months](#), and change them whenever they look dirty or at least every three months. This is especially important if someone in the house has allergies or asthma.

Now move into the kitchen. Though [sponges](#) are more economical and environmentally friendly than paper towels, they can quickly teem with bacteria. Popular approaches to try to kill germs off have included zapping the sponge in the microwave, putting it in the dishwasher with a high heat drying cycle, or disinfecting with a solution of concentrated bleach and water. But a study published in *Scientific Reports* found that this can make the problem worse—weaker strains of bacteria that were killed left room for stronger strains to multiply. When your sponge (or any dishcloth) starts to smell bad, replace it.

Even if you have designated cutting boards for meat and produce, they still need proper care. You must wash cutting boards after each use, place in the dishwasher or sanitize with a bleach solution. But once they develop deep hard-to-clean grooves, especially problematic with plastic boards, [bacteria](#) can thrive. At this point, even rigorous cleaning might not be enough—you'll need to replace the board. If you're shopping for new boards, consider bamboo, which is harder and less porous than the more common hardwoods used for this kitchen essential.

More information: The U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service has more tips on [cutting board safety](#).

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