

Improve indoor air quality this winter

Upon the arrival of winter, people in regions where winter is marked by cold weather tend to spend significantly more time indoors. Because windows tend to be closed during winter, indoor air quality can suffer, making conditions inside a home less than desirable.

According to the American Lung Association, poor air circulation in a home can promote the spread of bacteria and viruses. Once such bacteria or viruses are inhaled, coughs, colds and flu can spread. In addition, asthma and allergy sufferers may experience worsening symptoms thanks to the presence of endotoxins, which are substances that come from the broken-down cells of dead bacteria.

Because many people spend significantly more time indoors during winter than other times of the year, it's essential that they take measures to improve indoor air quality in the months ahead.

- **Cut back on chemicals.** It's ideal to avoid heavy chemical usage inside a home throughout the year, but it's especially important to do so during winter. Solvent-based cleaners or cleaning products with strong fragrances can negatively affect indoor air quality and potentially trigger allergic reactions. In lieu of chemically-enhanced cleaning products, use natural products that get the job done without sacrificing indoor air quality.

- **Stop smoking indoors.** Tobacco smoke can affect smokers and nonsmokers alike. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention note that secondhand smoke causes numerous health problems in infants and children. Those include more

frequent and severe asthma attacks and respiratory infections. In addition, reports from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services have linked secondhand smoke to an increased risk of sudden infant death syndrome. Adults exposed to secondhand smoke are at greater risk for coronary heart disease, stroke and lung cancer. Tobacco smoke contains thousands of pollutants that can greatly diminish indoor air quality, so make sure smokers limit their smoking to outside the home throughout the year, but especially during winter.

- **Take off your shoes when entering the home.** Snowy conditions often require a home's inhabitants and guests to remove their footwear upon entering a home, but it helps to remove footwear in a mudroom or just inside the front door when entering a home even when it's not snowing. Shoes can pick up dirt, dust and a host of other particles during winter, and if tracked inside those unwanted guests can negatively affect indoor air quality.

- **Routinely inspect bathrooms for mold.** During winter, mold can grow in rooms that are exposed to moisture but not properly ventilated. In many homes, that's the bathroom. Even if a bathroom has a ventilation fan, routinely inspect



the ceiling and shower for mold growth. Exposure to mold can cause a host of negative side effects, including nasal and sinus congestion and sore throat. Mold also can exacerbate asthma symptoms.

Improving and maintaining indoor air quality in winter can help a home's inhabitants stay healthy during the colder months.

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