

Healthy Indoor Environments

Where We Live, Learn and Play

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Indoor Air Quality Resources



[Air Cleaners and Air Filters in the Home](#)

(EPA, 2018)

[Tips for Mechanical Air Filters to Improve Home Energy Efficiency](#)

(eXtension, 2013)



Image Source: Pamela Turner

Remember to Change the Air Filters

Written by Becca Stackhouse, FACS Extension Agent, Crisp County

Indoor air quality is important because we spend almost 90 percent of our time indoors where we are exposed to two to five times more pollutants than outdoors. Some common indoor air pollutants are airborne particles, household odors & gases, formaldehyde, ozone and carbon monoxide. Changing the air filters inside your home is a must!

Recommendations vary based on the health status of who lives in your home, and the number of pets and occupants. An average home without pets needs a new filter every 90 days, but add in one furry pet (such as cat or dog), and the filter needs changed every 60 days. Add more than one pet and a person with allergies, then the filter needs replaced every 20 to 45 days. Vacation homes, or single occupancy homes without pets, could go every 6-12 months before the filter needs changed; however, that is not advisable. It is good for you to inspect and clean the air filters in your heating and cooling system every month. Changing your air filters helps improve energy efficiency in your home's heating and cooling system. When the air filter is covered with dust and hair, it reduces the efficiency of your system. This can also affect the long-term life of your air system because it has to work harder at its job.

Now that we have talked about the reasons to replace the air filters, let's talk about what to look for when facing all of the air filter options in the store. When purchasing a filter you should look for MERV (minimum efficacy reporting value) which is a standardized rating system for efficacy. The MERV rating ranges from 1-20 with the higher the number, the more efficient the filter is at capturing and holding onto the smallest sized dust and pollutant particles. The filters come in pleated and non-pleated form. Non-pleated filters have a 1-4 MERV, they can protect your heating and cooling equipment from dirt buildup, but are not considered good for indoor air quality. Pleated filters have MERV ratings of 5-13 and are efficient at removing small to large airborne particles. **Select a pleated filter.** MERV 7-13 are more likely to control most airborne indoor particles, MERV 14-16 are higher efficiency filters, and MERV 17-20, which are true HEPA filters you will not typically find for residential homes. There are also good options for filters that can be washed and reused; however, they are not as good at removing allergens.

Remember:

- (1) The goal is to have filters work properly to improve the air quality, so it is important that furniture, rugs, or drapes don't block the supply and return vents.
- (2) Make sure the filter you select is appropriate for your heating and cooling system.

Childproofing Your Home

Written by Carin Booth, FACS Extension Agent, Hall County

Unintentional injuries, or accidents, are one of the leading causes of death for children 1-4 years of age (Xu, et al, 2018). Many of these accidents occur in the home because of suffocation, falls, furniture tip-overs, drowning, toys, and button batteries. Most accidents are preventable.

It may seem overwhelming to childproof the entire house, but by taking the task room-by-room, you can make your home a safer space for you and your loved ones.

First, think about things you have in every room such as electrical outlets and blinds. Start by putting safety plugs over unused outlets. You can also place furniture in front of outlets. Make sure window blind cords are well out of reach and use a safety tassel to secure the cords.. It's even better to install cordless blinds.



Image Source: Pixabay

Then, think about rooms where you spend much of your time, like the family room and living room. Add edge and corner guards to furniture and move furniture away from windows. If you have a fireplace, add a fireplace screen and store matches and fire tools out of a child's reach. If you have any top-heavy furniture, be sure to use a wall strap or brace to secure the furniture to the wall. Keep televisions in mind as well. They should be placed on sturdy furniture or mounted to the wall when possible.

In the kitchen, keep knives, heavy pots, or sharp objects out of reach of children. You should also lock cabinets, especially if they contain poisonous cleaners or other products. If you store medications in the kitchen, keep those in a locked cabinet out of reach of children. A stove guard and knob covers will help prevent burns. Also, consider using nonslip mats to prevent falls in the kitchen and bathroom.

Finally, make sure you have working carbon monoxide detectors as well as smoke detectors outside each bedroom or sleeping area. Check batteries monthly and be sure to replace them at least once a year.

It is important to keep all harmful substances out of reach of children, especially things like laundry detergent and household cleaners. You may consider switching to safer green cleaning products instead of introducing harmful substances in the home.

For more information on green cleaning recipes and for a copy of the Childproofing your Home Checklist visit:

www.fcs.uga.edu/extension/home-publications.

References:

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Childproofing Your Home

A Room-by-Room Safety Checklist

Nearly 2.3 million children are accidentally injured every year and more than 2,500 are killed, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Since one of the biggest threats to children is an injury occurring at home, it is important to take preventative steps to childproof your home. While this may seem like a daunting task at first, this checklist includes basic tips, broken down by room, to help make your home safer for the whole family.

Authors: Morgan L. Barnett, MPH, Radon Education Program Specialist
Pamela R. Turner, Ph.D., Associate Professor and Extension Housing Specialist

Kitchen and Laundry Room

- Install a stove guard and knob covers to prevent burns.
- Store household cleaning and laundry products in locked cabinets or on high shelves out of reach of children.
- Medications and vitamins should be kept in a locked cabinet or out of reach of children. Special care needs to be taken to return potentially dangerous items to the same location any time they are taken down.
- Keep knives, breakables, heavy pots, and sharp objects in a secured area or out of children's reach.
- Place Mr. Yuk stickers on all poisonous substances, even if they are in locked cabinets or placed up high. Teach children what the stickers mean.

Bathroom

- Store medications and cleaning products in closed, locked cabinets.
- Prevent scalding from hot water by setting the water heater at 120 degrees F.
- Put nonslip mats in and next to bathtubs and showers to prevent falls.

Bedrooms

- Install carbon monoxide (CO) detectors near sleeping areas and on each level of your home.
- Install working smoke detectors near the bedrooms and on every level of your home. Check the batteries monthly and replace them once a year.



DIY Home Safety Tool Kit

Written by Pamela R. Turner, Housing Extension Specialist, Athens, GA

Many home injury-related deaths are preventable. Among children under age 15, the leading cause of preventable deaths is suffocation, followed by drowning. For adults the leading causes of death are poisoning and falls. In just a few hours you can reduce the risks in your home. Create your own do-it-yourself home safety inspection toolkit and get started making your home safer.



Tape Measure. Measure slats between stair and deck railings. They should be no more than 4 inches to keep children safe.



Thermometer. To protect from scalding, check the temperature of the hot water in the kitchen and bathrooms. If it is over 120 degrees, turn down the water heater.



Wood Block. Place it under your automatic garage door to make sure the sensor is working. If it is not working contact a qualified professional to repair the door.



Radon Test Kit. The only way to know if radon gas is in your home is to test. Long-term exposure to radon can lead to lung cancer. You can purchase a test kit from UGA Extension for \$15 online (radon.uga.edu).



GFCI Receptacle Tester. This tool is used to test the Ground-Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) outlets. These outlets are generally found near the kitchen sink and in the bathroom. They protect you from electric shocks. If your GFCI is not working you should contact a qualified electrician to repair it.



Lead Test Kit. If you own a home built before 1978 you should conduct a lead test to see if there is lead in the paint, especially around windows and doors. Learn more about lead at <https://www.epa.gov/lead/protect-your-family-exposures-lead>.

A Healthier Environment in 5 Minutes

Dr. Pamela Turner, Housing & Environment Extension Specialist, Athens, GA

Use these tips to improve your child care facility or your home. It's good for your health and safety as well as your loved ones and any children you care for.

1. Test your smoke alarm
2. Add the poison control number to your cell phone
3. Sing the *happy birthday* song twice while you are washing your hands in warm soapy water
4. Do a 3-minute clean sweep
5. Check your locks

Everyone deserves a safe and healthy home.

5 Minutes to a Healthier Home

Think you don't have enough time to make your home a healthier and safer place?

Think again!
You can do these steps in 5 minutes.

Test your smoke alarm.
Using smoke alarms in your home cuts your risk of dying in a fire in half.

Wash your hands with warm, soapy water for at least 20 seconds (about the time it takes to sing the song "Happy Birthday" twice).

Each year, about **48 million Americans get sick** from eating contaminated or improperly prepared foods.

Make your home smoke free. Never let anyone smoke anywhere in or near your home.

Parents are responsible for **90%** of their children's exposure to smoke.

Program the number for poison control into your cell phone: 1-800-222-1222.

Everyday in the United States, over 300 children ages 0 to 19 are treated in emergency departments for poisonings.

Do a 3-minute "clean sweep." Pick one small area of your home – like your junk drawer or stairs – and take 3 minutes to sort the items and get rid of what you don't need.

Clutter can collect dust, mold, and other allergens and gives pests a place to hide. If clutter is left on the floor or stairs, it can cause you to trip and fall.

Check your locks

Make sure locks function correctly and can be operated by a child in an emergency.

Have 5 more minutes?
Log on to www.hud.gov/healthyhomes for information on topics like lead, mold, radon, asbestos, pests, and more!

Healthy Home Hacks

Remove mothball smell from wood furniture by first airing out the item, then add some heat from a hair dryer, and finally place several bowls of baking soda, activated charcoal, or white vinegar around the item to absorb the smell. More info on [UGA GreenWay Pinterest](#) pages. ~ Pamela Turner

Clean a dirty shower curtain liner by washing it in a washing machine with some towels, laundry detergent and a cup of vinegar. ~ Pamela Turner

Eliminate clothing odors by adding a half cup of washing soda (found in the laundry aisle) to a load of laundry. Read the labels on your clothing to make sure you are washing them correctly. ~ Keishon Thomas



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