

The Retrofit NYC Guide to Detoxing Your Home

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Unwanted Toxins In Your Homes

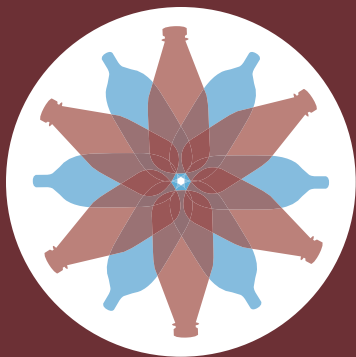
Every day New Yorkers are exposed to toxins that are dangerous to your health, your homes and the environment. Many of these chemicals are especially dangerous for children and pregnant women. Some are known to cause cancer, disrupt hormones, and lead to respiratory disease and allergies.

Make choices for your health, your kids and your neighbors

Fortunately, you can use your purchasing power and change your behavior at no cost and with little effort. This is why Retrofit NYC Block by Block developed these simple tips about energy, air, water, cleaning products, plastics, mold, lead, pesticides, and food. Just one step can make a difference for your health and help create a better environment for everyone.

What is Retrofit NYC Block by Block?

Retrofit NYC Block by Block is a campaign to reduce energy use and raise environmental awareness and action in six New York City neighborhoods. We are assisting home and building owners to reduce the use (and costs) of electricity, heating fuel, and water. These tips are part of our outreach effort to make New Yorkers' homes not only more energy efficient, but also healthier.



PLASTIC

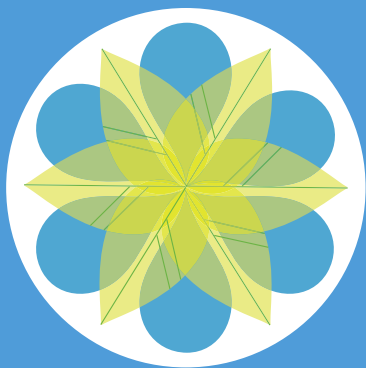
USE LESS.

You store your food in it, drink from it, bag groceries in it. Babies teethe on it and drink from bottles made from it. But research reveals that many plastics release toxic chemicals, like BPA and phthalates, into food and drink. If ingested they can disrupt the body's hormones and damage the nervous system. According to the Centers for Disease Control, more than 92 percent of Americans have BPA in their urine and over 200 studies link it to harmful effects and birth defects. Children's developing bodies are particularly vulnerable if exposed.



Use **Safer** Plastics

1. Only use plastics marked #2, #4 or #5 for food and beverages. Don't use #3 or #6 labeled plastics or Styrofoam since they will leach into the food.
2. Only store cold food and drinks in plastic containers. Heat can cause chemicals to leach into the food.
3. Don't use damaged or scratched plastics.
4. Use ONLY ceramic or glass dishes in the microwave. NEVER use plastics.
5. Get a reusable stainless steel water bottle instead of drinking from plastic water bottles.
6. Choose teethers and baby bottles labeled "phthalate-free" and "BPA-free."
7. Avoid PVC products such as fake leather and vinyl shower curtains. Choose PVC-free products or fabrics.
8. Use reuseable shopping bags and recycle plastics whenever possible.



CLEANING PRODUCTS

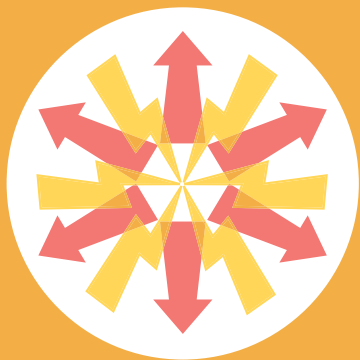
CAN BE TOXIC.

The smells we associate with “clean” are often the smells of dangerous chemicals. Hundreds of kids in New York City accidentally drink cleaning products every year, according to the city’s Poison Control Center. Poison from cleaning products can also enter the body through the skin. In fact, cleaning products are some of the most toxic materials in our homes.



Green Your Clean

1. Purchase nontoxic or “green” cleaning products. These are increasingly available at a reasonable cost.
2. Avoid products labeled “DANGER!” or “POISON!” If you do use these products, store them out of reach of children, ventilate well, and rinse cleaned surfaces with water.
3. Try do-it-yourself cleaning products:
 - All-purpose cleaner: Combine 1 part water to 1 part vinegar. Put in an empty spray bottle. Vinegar leaves no scent once it’s dry. For a scent add rosemary oil or your favorite essential oil.
 - Grease remover: Sprinkle some baking soda on a wet sponge or towel and wipe off the grease.
 - Drain opener: Pour 1/2 cup baking soda and 1/2 cup salt (or 1/2 cup vinegar) down the drain, followed by 6 cups of boiling water.



ENERGY

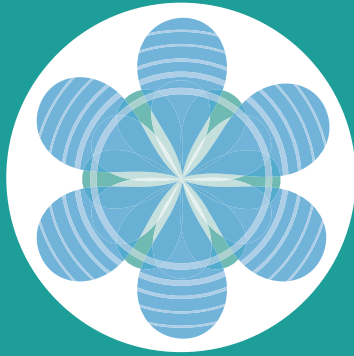
**YOU PROBABLY WASTE
MORE THAN YOU THINK.**

Whenever cold air slips through a crack or an unused electronic device is left on, costly energy is wasted. In New York City, buildings account for 80 percent of greenhouse gas emissions—a significant contribution to global warming. Electricity is already expensive in New York City and costs are likely to rise. Changing your habits at home has the power to help save the environment and lower your household electric and heating bills.



How to Save Energy

1. Unplug chargers and small appliances when not in use. Plugged-in electronics still use energy.
2. Look for energy efficient ENERGY STAR® labeled electronics when shopping.
3. Use your refrigerator efficiently:
 - Adjust the thermostat to the recommended setting.
 - Allow hot food to cool before putting it inside.
 - Avoid opening the door multiple times.
 - Keep it well stocked...less room means less room for warm air to enter.
4. In the winter, open shades during the day and close them at night. In the summer, close shades during the day and open windows at night.
5. Turn your thermostat down 2 degrees in the winter and turn it up 2 degrees in the summer.
6. Use energy-efficient lighting. Install air sealing and insulation in order to reduce your energy use; take advantage of financial incentives to help pay for these improvements.



WATER

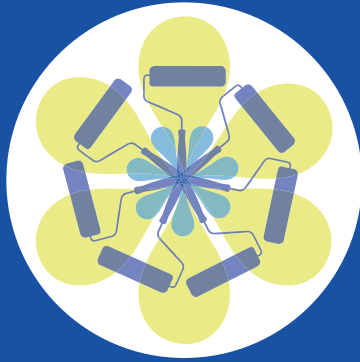
MORE THAN WATER DOWN THE DRAIN.

An average New Yorker uses 100 gallons of water every day and much of it is money down the drain. The New York City Department of Environmental Protection has estimated that such leaks are responsible for 14 percent of the city's water use. Home owners pay up to \$671 annually for a leaky faucet and \$932 for a leaky toilet. Wasted water also pollutes New York City's waters. The local sewage system is easily overloaded; every year, more than two billion gallons of raw, untreated sewage winds up in the city's waterways.



You Can Save Water Without Sacrifice

1. Install a low-flow showerhead. There are many affordable options that can provide strong water pressure.
2. Turn off the tap while you brush your teeth.
3. Cut one minute from your shower time to save gallons.
4. Don't let tap water run while you wash your dishes. Use a dishwasher if you have one.
5. Fix water leaks. Even a small leak can waste a lot of water (and money!).
6. Plant a tree! Request a free street tree from MillionTreesNYC. Trees absorb water and reduce run-off.



LEAD

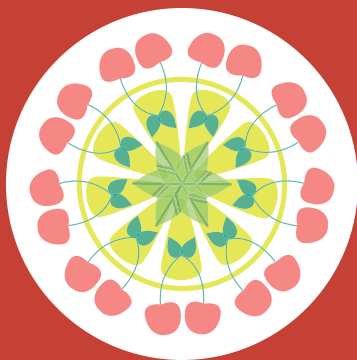
IS DANGEROUS.

When it comes to children, there is no safe level for lead. Exposure to lead can interfere with healthy brain development and result in a lower IQ. For that reason, in 2004 New York City passed Local Law 1 to prevent childhood lead poisoning through the repair of lead paint hazards in housing and day care facilities. Yet, in 2009, more than 1,000 children in New York City were found to have high levels of lead in their blood.



Lead is Dangerous

- 1.** Old paint contains lead. If your home has more than two square feet of lead paint, it is critical to call in professionals to make repairs.
- 2.** If you are a tenant with children under 6 years old and suspect there is lead in your home, you can file a complaint and request an inspection by calling 311.
- 3.** Make sure your doctor tests your child every year until the age of 6 to monitor lead exposure.
- 4.** Wash your children's hands and clean their toys often to remove dust and dirt that may contain lead.
- 5.** Always use cold water for drinking, cooking, and making baby formula. Hot water can release lead from pipes. Run water for 30 seconds to flush lead from pipes. Get a free water-testing kit to detect lead by calling 311.
- 6.** Vinyl lunchboxes may contain lead, so use only lead-free lunch boxes.



FOOD

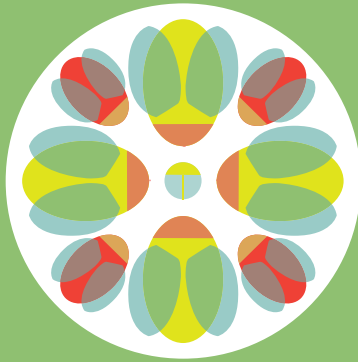
IS YOUR HEALTH.

Do you know what is in your food? Pesticides used to grow food may leave a residue on fruits, vegetables, grains, and beans. Many pesticides are linked to birth defects, nerve damage, cancer, and other illness, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Mercury, another unwanted ingredient that is common in fish, can cause brain damage in fetuses and children. Toxic chemicals aren't the only problem. Eating too much of certain foods can have serious impacts on your health, like heart disease, the number-one killer of New Yorkers.



Eat Safe Food

- 1.** If possible, eat organic food. Organic farmers do not use pesticides.
- 2.** The following fruits and vegetables absorb higher levels of pesticides so when possible, choose organic or minimally treated: celery, peaches, strawberries, apples, blueberries, nectarines, bell peppers, spinach, kale, cherries, potatoes, and grapes.
- 3.** Peel fruits and vegetables and discard the outer leaves of leafy vegetables to reduce intake of pesticides.
- 4.** Remove fat and skin from meat and chicken before cooking. Pesticides can collect in animal fat.
- 5.** Eat more fruits, vegetables, and beans. They are better for your health and for the planet. And don't forget to wash them before eating!
- 6.** Drink low-fat milk, sugar-free sodas, or water instead of sugary drinks.
- 7.** Call 311 to get a detailed guide on low-mercury fish.



PESTICIDES

ARE POISON.

Many pesticides contain cancer-causing chemicals that can damage nerve cells and disrupt the body's hormones. A study conducted by the Columbia Center for Children's Environmental Health found that babies born to women exposed to pesticides were more likely to have physical and learning disabilities. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is an alternative to pesticides that involves removing moisture, sealing up holes, and eliminating any pest food sources. Columbia's study found that when IPM was practiced it reduced cockroaches in half—more than regular pesticides—and eliminated pesticide exposure.



Pesticides are Poison

1. Avoid products that say Danger!!! or Poison!!!
2. Never use pesticide bombs or sprays. Instead use glue traps, gels, and bait stations. If you must use pesticides, open windows and keep them out of reach of children.
3. When hiring a professional exterminator, consider using a firm that practices IPM.
4. Fix leaks and wipe up spills. Insects like wet spots.
5. Avoid attracting insects and pests. Store all food (including pet food) in tightly covered containers.
6. Use caulking and spray foam to seal cracks and holes in walls and cabinets, especially in the kitchen and the bathroom, to block pest entryways. They're available at any hardware store.



INDOOR AIR POLLUTION

**AIR INSIDE MAY BE
WORSE THAN AIR OUTSIDE.**

New York City low-income and minority communities are particularly at risk for asthma. Many people know that outdoor car and truck exhaust is linked to asthma and allergies. But the air indoors, where we spend most of our time, is often even worse. By improving air quality inside your home, you can reduce your family's risk for asthma and allergy problems.



Clear the Air

1. Don't smoke in your home! Second-hand tobacco smoke can cause cancer. Call 311 for free nicotine patches and other materials to help you quit.
2. Keep your home free from the toxins and allergens that come in from the street:
 - Leave your shoes at the door or use a mat.
 - Vacuum carpets regularly to reduce dust and allergens.
 - Clean and dust hard surfaces.
3. Avoid using air fresheners, which commonly contain hormone-disrupting and toxic chemicals.
4. Install carbon monoxide detectors to monitor harmful, or even deadly, carbon monoxide generated by faulty appliances or heating systems. Test your detectors once per month to make sure the alarms work.
5. Look for no-VOC paints and finishes. VOCs are Volatile Organic Chemicals and can be dangerous for humans.
6. Fix leaks in plumbing and windows to prevent mold.

Retrofit NYC Block by Block is a project of the Pratt Center for Community Development and some of New York City's leading community development corporations:

- Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn
- Chhaya CDC, Jamaica, Queens
- Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation, Cypress Hills, Brooklyn
- El Puente, Southside of Williamsburg, Brooklyn
- Neighborhood Housing Services of Staten Island, West Brighton
- Sustainable South Bronx, Soundview

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