How to Create a Healthier Home Environment

<u>Abstract</u>:

You might often come across news stories about air pollution and its impacts on public health. But how frequently do you think about the quality of the air indoors? While outdoor air pollution poses a concern, it is easy to forget that the quality of the air you breathe at home is just as important. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), levels of air pollutants indoors may not only be up to 100 times higher than outdoor air pollutants, they could also have a greater effect on your health.

<u>Getting Started</u>

Creating a healthier home environment is essential for improving well-being and enhancing quality of life. From reducing allergens to improving indoor air quality, small changes can make a big difference. This guide will walk you through practical steps to create a safer, cleaner, and more comfortable living space for you and your family. Whether it's incorporating natural cleaning solutions, optimizing ventilation, or minimizing exposure to harmful chemicals, these tips are easy to implement and sustainable in the long run. A healthier home promotes better physical and mental health, helping everyone feel more relaxed and energized. Let's explore how you can transform your space into a sanctuary of wellness with mindful choices and everyday habits.

1. <u>What is a healthy home environment?</u>

A healthy home environment refers to a living space designed to promote the well-being, safety, and comfort of its occupants. It minimizes exposure to harmful elements like allergens, chemicals, and pollutants while enhancing physical and mental health. Achieving such an environment involves a combination of clean air, safe materials, proper lighting, and healthy lifestyle habits. Here's a breakdown of its essential aspects:

Key Components of a Healthy Home Environment:

Indoor Air Quality (IAQ)

Proper ventilation and the use of air purifiers reduce dust, mold, pet dander, and airborne pollutants. Opening windows regularly or installing air filtration systems ensures fresh air flow.

Chemical-Free Spaces

Limiting the use of toxic substances such as harsh cleaning chemicals, pesticides, and synthetic fragrances prevents exposure to harmful compounds like VOCs (volatile organic compounds).

Moisture Control and Mold Prevention

Ensuring that bathrooms, kitchens, and basements are well-ventilated prevents mold and mildew, which can cause respiratory issues. Fixing leaks and maintaining optimal humidity (around 30-50%) also plays a vital role.

Natural Lighting and Noise Reduction

Adequate natural light improves mood and regulates sleep-wake cycles. Reducing noise pollution, especially in urban settings, helps create a calm atmosphere and lowers stress levels.

Clutter-Free and Organized Space

A tidy home reduces mental clutter and promotes relaxation. Minimizing unnecessary items prevents dust buildup and makes the space more manageable.

Safe and Non-Toxic Materials

Using eco-friendly paints, furniture, and building materials ensures the home is free from harmful chemicals. Flame-retardant-free furnishings and organic fabrics also promote safety and health.

Pest Control

Implementing preventive pest control strategies helps avoid exposure to pests that can carry diseases. Sealing cracks and using natural deterrents minimize the need for chemical pesticides.

By addressing these factors, a healthy home environment ensures a balanced space that nurtures the mind, body, and soul, making it conducive to good health and happiness.

2. <u>Why is a healthy home environment important for mental health?</u>

Some symptoms of depression are well known: lethargy, a loss of interest in things you once found enjoyable (known as anhedonia), hopelessness, and deep sadness. But there are other depression warning signs you may not be aware of: stacks of dirty dishes in the sink; a towering pile of unfolded laundry that you washed days ago; boxes, wrappers, and bags dotting the disheveled landscape of your home.

We're all prone to messy moments, but when intense disorganization is accompanied by symptoms of high stress, anxiety, burnout, or depression, it's often an indicator that you may be struggling with your mental health.

The Proven Link Between Home and Mental Health

Mental health struggles, like depression, interfere with levels of motivation, energy, and interest.

It's no wonder that less-than-ideal mental well-being can often lead to unorganized surroundings. According to the DSM-5, the handbook that mental health professionals use to guide their diagnoses, the criteria for depression include a diminished motivation and interest in activities, a slow-down of physical movement, loss of energy, and indecisiveness—all things that usually come in handy in order to keep your home clean and organized.

Clutter can make it more difficult for you to enjoy a space.

Scientific studies frequently find correlations between mental wellness and clutter. For example, one 2016 study from the University of New Mexico found that clutter directly interfered with the participants' ability to feel pleasure in a space.

Disarray at home is associated with higher stress levels.

The tricky part is, if you're grappling with your mental well-being, but still desire a clean, organized home, you may, unfortunately, find yourself trapped in a vicious cycle, something Natalie Christine Dattilo, PhD, clinical health psychologist and instructor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, believes is a common chicken-or-egg dilemma.

Disorganization can affect relationships and other lifestyle factors, causing a negative snowball effect.

Shira Gill, organizing expert and author of Minimalista, thinks clutter goes even further than taking an emotional toll on your mind, indirectly affecting other areas of our lives. She says clutter can additionally lead to relationship strains, along with financial stressors, which can include late fees on lost bills and overspending by buying duplicates. Clutter can also distract you from focusing on other priorities.

The Positive Benefits of a Clean, Organized Home

Experts agree that tidy, organized spaces can improve mental health. Gill says that a well-edited home can create "a whole cascade of mental health benefits," which can include a sense of clarity and control, an improved quality of life, a boosted sense of confidence, an increase in productivity, and a more tranquil atmosphere.

But whether you're dealing with a mental health condition or not, organization takes time and commitment. It's just more difficult when you finally get yourself out of bed and you're faced with a choice: shower or fold laundry? Cleaning may feel like a superhuman effort, but know that even if it's simply putting a dish away, it can pay off in big ways for your psyche.

"Decluttering requires decision-making, emotion regulation, prioritization, and patience," Dattilo says. "We receive important cues about how we're doing by what we're doing, and when we maintain an organized home, we reinforce the message that we are worth the time, effort, and practice it takes to live in a cared-for and curated space. In the same way that a cluttered space can make us feel overwhelmed and anxious, a well-organized and tidy space can make us feel calm and safe."

Try a helpful cleaning method, like the 'Ski Slope Method.'

Borrow the genius "Ski Slope Method" for decluttering from licensed therapist-turned-interior-designer Anita Yokota. In her latest book, Home Therapy, Yokota uses a mountain ski slope analogy to describe a helpful way to manage and tidy your home. "The idea is to imagine your messy room like a ski slope. If you try to go straight down, the steep angle feels scary and overwhelming. But if you traverse the slope—skiing from one side to the other—you lessen the angle and make it down the mountain without even noticing. Instead of looking at the room from front to back, look at it from corner to corner," she writes.

Pick one corner or section of one room and dive in, moving on to a corner on the other side of the room next, "like you would traverse a mountain," Yokota says in her book.

Create simple systems.

When you're depressed, burned out, or anxious, it can be difficult to think clearly through all the "mental clutter" you're dealing with as well. That's why it's key to have some straightforward systems in place that will make it easier to keep your spaces in order.

"Take note of the items you frequently misplace and create a clear and designated home for each one," Gill says. "For example, the keys can go on the small hook by the door, your phone can always be returned to the charging station in your office, and your sunglasses can live in your daily handbag when not in use. The key is to pick one intuitive and designated.

3. How does air quality affect your home environment?

The rising levels of outdoor air pollution, spurred by factors like vehicle emissions, fossil fuel burning and industrial exhaust gases, is worrying enough to make you want to stay indoors as much as possible. But surprisingly, even the indoor air isn't exactly as clean and healthy as we'd like to believe. In fact, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), indoor air can often be two to five times more polluted than outdoor air.

"On average, we spend around 90% of our time indoors. So, it's important to keep our indoor air as clean as possible, especially during winter months when we like to keep our windows and doors shut tight to seal out the cold," says Abby Lemon, application engineer at Filtrete.

What causes indoor air pollution?

The most common sources of indoor air pollution include asbestos, carbon monoxide emissions from central heating systems and gas stoves, radon, mold, tobacco smoke and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) found in household items like disinfectants, air fresheners, paint, carpeting, adhesives, pesticides and wood preservatives.

How does polluted indoor air affect your health?

Common short-term effects of indoor air pollution include dryness and irritation of the eyes, nose, throat, and skin, headaches, fatigue, shortness of breath, hypersensitivity and allergies, sinus congestion, coughing, sneezing, even dizziness, tells Dr. Gupta.

So, what can you do to improve the indoor air quality of your home?

While toxic indoor air has become a serious problem today, the good news is that it can be effectively managed with the right tools and techniques. Here are eight simple ways to purify the air in your home:

Get to the source.

One of the most effective ways to curb indoor air pollution is to eliminate individual sources of pollution or to reduce their emissions. "This includes using non-toxic extermination methods to get rid of pests, having floors with minimal carpeting to reduce dust mites, washing linen in hot water, cleaning rugs and carpets with a HEPA filter vacuum cleaner at least once a week and using non-toxic, fragrance-free household cleaners," tells Dr. Gupta. You can further combat air pollution by switching to essential oil diffusers instead of air fresheners and adjusting gas stove and installing a kitchen ventilation system to reduce the amount of emissions. In addition, "remove your shoes when you get home to make sure that you're not tracking pollen or other allergy triggers into the home," says Lemon.

Reduce exposure to carbon monoxide.

Heating equipment such as unvented kerosene heaters, wood stoves, gas water heaters and central heating systems are some of the most common sources of carbon monoxide emissions indoors. Leaking chimneys and furnaces can further pump carbon monoxide inside your home. This is why it's important to ensure that all combustion equipment are maintained and properly adjusted to minimize toxic fumes. Make sure that the doors on all wood stoves fit tightly and

have a trained professional inspect, clean and tune-up central heating system (furnaces, flues and chimneys) once every year, suggests EPA. Also, open flues when using a fireplace and choose a wood stove that's certified to meet EPA emission standards, it adds. "Having a carbon monoxide monitor is also useful to track levels of this odorless gas in your home," says Dr. Gupta.

Eliminate mold.

Exposure to mold can lead to a number of health problems such as wheezing, sore throat, skin rashes, watery eyes and headaches. The best way to get rid of mold is to manage the humidity levels in your home, particularly in areas like the kitchen and washrooms. "Turn on the exhaust fan in the bathroom immediately after bathing to help remove the humidity from the room," suggests Lemon. Here are a few more tips on how to remove mold from every home surface.

Monitor radon levels.

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas. Inhaling radon is the leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers and the second most common cause of lung cancer in general, states EPA. Since it's odorless and colorless, testing is the only way to determine and reduce radon levels in your house. EPA suggests installing a radon reduction system and getting the cost estimate from one or more qualified radon mitigation contractors. It usually costs the same as other common home repairs. Though the exact cost may vary depending on the size and design of your home and which radon reduction methods are needed, says EPA. If you're a tenant, here's a quick guide on how to measure and fix high radon levels in your rented space.

Increase ventilation.

"Proper ventilation allows harmful air pollutants and allergens to circulate outside thereby limiting your exposure to it," says Dr. Gupta. Even in the cold months, open windows and turn on window or attic fans from time to time to allow fresh air to move into the house, suggests EPA. "However, if you live near a highway or a busy road, avoid opening your windows during early morning hours and during the traffic rush hours," tells Dr. Gupta.
Groom your pets regularly. Pet dander (ie; dead skin cells shed by an animal) is another common culprit behind indoor air pollution. If you're a pet parent, make sure you properly brush your pet's coat regularly and vacuum all the carpeting, floors and furnishings using a vacuum cleaner with HEPA filter.

Invest in an air purifier.

Using air purifiers is another effective way to tackle stale indoor air. "You can place them in commonly used rooms, like in the living room, kitchen and bedrooms, to help ventilate and clean the air in these spaces," says Lemon. Here's the EPA guide on how to choose the right air purifier for your home. You can also use certain houseplants to detoxify indoor air naturally. "Plants like peace lilies, snake plants, golden pothos, English ivy, Chinese evergreen and rubber

plants are a great choice as they help purify the air by minimizing the effects of pollutants such as formaldehyde, ammonia and carbon monoxide," says Lemon.

Change the filters. If you have a forced-air heating system, it's important to change the filters on a regular basis. Additionally, "use a high-performance air filter that can help capture and trap even small particles and allergens–like pet dander, smoke, dust and viruses," says Lemon.

4. How to remove mould from ceiling safely?

Mould infestation in a house can pose serious health concerns, especially if you have allergies and asthma symptoms. Exposure to nasty spores may cause allergic reactions, such as eye irritation, nasal congestion, respiratory disorders, skin infections, etc. Furthermore, it can cause structural damage if not treated proactively.

Mould is a common fungus that grows in dark, moist, and damp areas, and ceilings are one of the most vulnerable spots. The black, green, or brown spots on the ceiling wall not only ruin the overall look and feel of your house but also pollute the indoor air. Thus, it becomes imperative to remove mould stains as quickly as possible. Since ceilings are one of the most difficult places to

reach, make sure you have the proper supplies and tools to access the area without causing any injury.

Identify the Mould Spores on your Ceilings

Before starting the cleaning process, identify the type of mould and its potential sources. Check for cracked spots, peeling paint, recurrent back streaks, discolouration, or a musty smell in the room. It is also good to follow smart sprucing hacks in-between professional cleans to prevent dust and mould accumulation.

However, it is difficult to kill Aspergillus mould from porous material, such as popcorn ceiling, drywall and wood. It will come back later. You must eliminate the affected area and replace it with a new one.

On the other hand, Cladosporium mould, often green, black and brown, often grows in damp areas, such as attics and basements. So, it is good to thoroughly inspect your house and identify the affected areas on the ceiling.

Keep Safety Measures in Mind

Safety comes first when tackling household fungus and germs. Inhaling mould spores can trigger your allergies and cause infections. So, it is important to wear an N-95 mask that filters out spores and protects your lungs.

Professionals also wear rubber gloves; goggles and other protective gear for a cheap vacate cleaning Perth. You should shield your eyes and skin when cleaning mould off the ceiling.

Prepare Non-Toxic Mould Removal Sprays

Instead of using traditional cleaning products, prepare an effective, affordable and environmentally friendly mould removal spray at home. Here are three different recipes you can use to prepare a DIY product for nasty spores on ceilings.

- **White Vinegar Solution:**
  Mix undiluted vinegar and one part of warm water into a spray bottle. It is one of the most effective cleaning products that will sink into the drywall and break down mould spores without causing any damage. It is also good to follow sustainable cleaning practices, such as natural sponges and microfiber cloths to prevent greenhouse gas emissions.

- **Hydrogen Peroxide Mould Removal**:

Add 3 per cent hydrogen peroxide into a spray bottle. It has antibacterial and antifungal properties that will help you kill mould and mildew from surfaces.

- **DIY Borax Solution**:
  Many professional vacate cleaners Perth use borax to treat stains and grime. Add one cup of borax to a bucket full of water. It is a natural cleaning product that doesn't produce toxic fumes.

Use a Step Stool or Ladder to Access the Ceiling

Lack of accessibility may restrict you from cleaning the ceilings. However, it is good to use a step stool or ladder to easily access the affected area and tackle the task perfectly.

Be sure you stand on a sturdy surface to prevent slide or fall. You can also place a non-slip on the stool for better gripping.

Spray the Solution on the Affected Area

Next, spray the homemade cleaning solution (preferably vinegar) onto the mould. Saturate all the affected areas and leave it for 10 minutes. This will penetrate the solution into the ceiling and take you a step closer to clean painted walls and ceilings.

Tip: Be careful when spraying the solution, as drips can cause skin irritation.

Gently Scrub the Stains using a Sponge

Mechanical action is needed when tackling stubborn stains, grease, grime, caked-on gunk, and mould. To prevent scratches and other damage, you can use a sponge or a magic eraser.

Gently scrub the affected spot and remove mould spores. Shift the step stool to reach all the parts of the mould infestation on ceilings.

Tip: Take regular breaks and rinse the sponge to prevent the spread of spores.

Wipe and Dry the Ceilings

Use a damp cloth to wipe the ceilings down to remove mould stains and soap residue. Make sure you dry the surface, as these nasty spores thrive in a moist environment.

So, open the doors and windows and run a fan to accelerate the process.

Repaint or Sand Down the Ceiling

Are you at the end of your tenancy in Perth? If yes, then do necessary repairs, such as repainting the walls. Before the final inspection, sand down the mould-affected surfaces to remove lingering traces and enhance the overall look and feel.

Use waterproof paint to prevent mould re-growth, while sanding keeps your ceilings clean and shiny. You can also hire experts for a budget vacate cleaning Perth and spruce up the entire property. They can help you pass the rental inspection without a hint of stress.

5. <u>What are the best ways To Create A Healthy Home Environment?</u>

While diet, exercise, and sleep are fundamental to your overall health, it's also important to address the space where you likely spend most of your time: your home.

Depending on your type of dwelling (a whole house, a small apartment, a room), your living space may require a lot or very little upkeep. Regardless of where you live, there are key aspects to look at in order to create and maintain a healthy home.
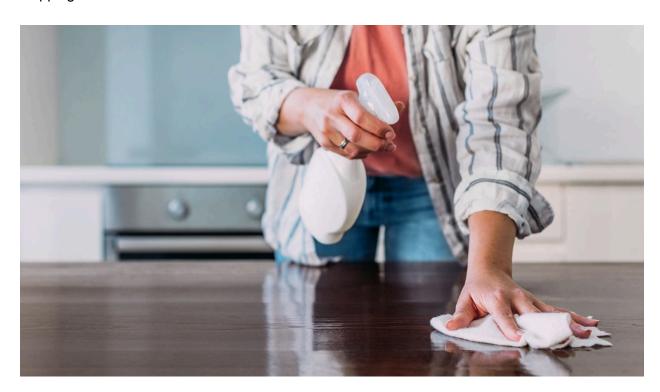
Here, we break down the most important ways to keep your home safe and healthy, as recommended by experts.

Keep Your Home Safe

Every home should have safety features that not only keep the structure itself intact, but also make it a clean place to breathe in. Refer to the following a checklist as you assess the safety of your own home.

Preserve Indoor Air Quality

First, it's important to address the air you breathe inside. According to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology (AAAI), 50 percent of homes are thought to have at least six allergens detectable in the air. These include dust mites, mold, pet dander, and cockroach droppings.

While it's a good idea to keep your home ventilated whenever possible, extreme heat and cold, along with outdoor allergens and air pollution, may make it difficult to keep your windows open. Here are some other ways to control allergens in your home for better indoor air quality:

- Keep your thermostat below 70 degrees F, and try to keep humidity levels between 40 and 50 percent if possible — this can discourage dust mites.

- Vacuum any rugs or carpeting regularly to control dust mites, pollen, and pet dander.

- Wash all bedding once a week in hot water to get rid of allergens.

- Try to keep your bathroom dry to prevent mold and mildew from growing. If there's mold present on any hard surfaces, clean them promptly with bleach cleaners in a well-ventilated area. You should also check regularly for leaking pipes underneath sinks.

- Clean floors, kitchen counters, and sinks regularly to prevent cockroaches — their droppings are common asthma triggers. (See below for more cleaning tips.)

Prevent Falls

According to the National Institute on Aging, about 60 percent of all falls happen at home. This is because we spend a large amount of time at home, and we naturally let our guard down there, moving around distractedly without thinking about safety.

The institute suggests the following tips to prevent falls and potentially serious injuries.

- Make sure there's good lighting throughout your home, and install night lights in bathrooms and other spaces you might need to access in the dark.

- Install handrails wherever possible, including along stairs, toilets, and bathtubs.
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- Avoid small area rugs. If you have a larger rug, check to make sure the corners are firmly affixed to the floor beneath it, such as with a secure rug pad to prevent slippage.

- Make sure there are no electrical or telephone cords obstructing any common areas where people may walk.

- Wear a medical alarm if your doctor considers you at a higher risk for falls.

Clean Your Home

Healthy home maintenance means getting rid of indoor allergens, cleaning regularly, and occasionally disinfecting common surfaces. Cleaning your bedding, floors, and carpets, as discussed above, is also part of managing indoor allergens, per the AAAAI.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), regular cleanings remove not only dirt, but germs, such as norovirus. Disinfection, on the other hand, may be necessary if you or another member of your household is sick.

The agency recommends cleaning the following areas often:

- Countertops

- Doorknobs

- Light switches

- Toys

- Carpets and other flooring

- Electronic devices, such as laptops and smartphones

- Cleaning involves scrubbing with soap and water, while sanitization reduces germs with the help of sprays or products that contain small amounts of bleach, according to the CDC. Always clean surfaces to remove dirt and debris before sanitizing.

Occasionally, you may need to disinfect common surfaces in your home. The CDC recommends disinfecting surfaces if there's someone in your household who is sick, or if you need to protect a household member who may be immunocompromised.

As with sanitizing, you'll want to clean surfaces before disinfecting them, as the CDC suggests. But unlike sanitizing, disinfection involves the use of stronger chemicals that kill viruses, bacteria, and other germs. Follow all product labels carefully, and make sure your room is well ventilated before you use disinfectants. When you're done, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

Clothing and Bedding

Aside from BPA in food items and packaging, you may also consider avoiding potentially harmful substances in the clothing you wear and the bedding you sleep in. These include per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS.

According to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, PFAS may potentially harm your health by:

- Increasing cholesterol levels

- Changing liver enzymes

- Increasing your blood pressure

- Posing the risk for certain cancers, such as kidney and testicular cancer

- Increasing the risk of pre-eclampsia in pregnant women

- Decreasing infant birth weight

- Decreasing vaccine response in children

Since these risks vary depending on exposure, you may consider using only PFAS-free textiles in your home. According to the Environmental Working Group, you can find bedding and clothing, as well as carpets, furniture, and personal care products that are free of PFAS.

6.What are the most effective ways to maintain cleanliness in your home?

Regular cleaning is an important part of keeping your home healthy. This includes preventing and mitigating bacteria, viruses, and other pests like moths, silverfish, and bedbugs that can do harm if left unchecked. And regular cleaning is even more crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic. SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, can live on some surfaces in your home for days. Luckily, it's easy to get rid of the virus material from these surfaces with some basic disinfectants and cleaning procedures. Read on to learn about some common trouble spots around the house and solutions for keeping your living spaces safe and healthy.

How to clean a kitchen

Everyone gravitates to the kitchen.

Part restaurant, part entertainment center, and part family room, it's ground zero for the most troublesome spots in the home. Practically every surface is a magnet for bacteria, viruses, germs, insects, and other pests.

Your kitchen can also be one of the most likely places you can transfer a virus, like SARS-CoV-2, into your household. A 2020 study found that this coronavirus can live for hours or days on many common kitchen surfaces:

- **copper**: 8 hours

- **cardboard**: 24 hours

- **stainless steel**: 48 hours

- plastic: 3 days
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Here are some general tips for disinfecting your kitchen surfaces to prevent COVID-19:

- **Wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds** before you touch anything, especially if you've been outside or at work.

- **Sanitize your hands with a 60 percent (or higher) alcohol sanitizer** if soap and water aren't immediately available.

- **Regularly wipe down all kitchen surfaces**, including counters, tabletops, and any other surface you frequently touch, like stove or microwave buttons. Use an EPA-approved disinfectant if available.

- **Wash all dishes and silverware** before and after you use them.

In the bathroom

The bathroom is a relatively new thing. For thousands of years, people relied on outhouses and public baths, and for good reason — to keep pathogens and waste away from living quarters.

Today, we have the luxury of toilets and bathtubs, and pathogens can lurk where you wouldn't expect them.

Toilet handle

The toilet may be an easy mark for potential health dangers in the bathroom, but it's for a reason you might not expect.

Sure, you know to keep the bowl and the seat clean, but how often do you clean the flush handle? Rotavirus, enterococcus, and other nasty pests can live there. Enterococcus can cause bacterial gastroenteritis. Rotavirus is the most common cause of diarrhea among children.

Floor to ceiling

Mold can thrive in the bathroom and present a number of health problems, from watery, itchy eyes to asthma attacks.

Another danger lurking in your bathroom, and possibly throughout your house, is trichophyton.

This fungus causes ringworm and athlete's foot and can be passed from one person's foot to the next via flooring.

Conclusion:

Transforming your home into a healthier space is key to improving your well-being and quality of life. Start by enhancing indoor air quality with proper ventilation, air purifiers, and allergen control. Switch to eco-friendly products by using non-toxic cleaners and sustainable materials to reduce chemical exposure. Natural light can uplift your mood, so optimize your space by letting in sunlight and using energy-efficient lighting. Keeping your home organized and clutter-free not only reduces dust but also creates a calming atmosphere. Lastly, incorporate healthy routines such as better sleep hygiene, regular air circulation, and stress-relieving practices like aromatherapy. A healthier home environment promotes physical comfort, emotional balance, and lasting wellness.

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