



Fresh air indoors

Giving your home's indoor air a refresh can help reduce health issues

by LISA A. BEACH



COSTCO CONNECTION

Air purifiers, vacuums, humidifiers and dehumidifiers (available beginning in September), air conditioners, houseplants, a variety of flooring options and more are available in Costco warehouses and at [Costco.com](https://www.costco.com).

Working remotely means you might be rethinking the air quality in your home office, since poor indoor air can trigger multiple health issues. Common culprits that affect indoor air quality include mold, pollen, dust mites, second-hand smoke, and pet hair and dander.

Dr. Andrew O'Keefe, who is with NL Allergy & Immunology in St. John's, Newfoundland, and serves as asthma chairman of the Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, groups these triggers into two main categories: allergens (think dust mites, pet dander and mold) and irritants (anything you could smell, such as smoke or cleaning products). "Although both can cause similar symptoms and be bothersome," he explains, "irritants don't really have a test to show truly allergic reactivity."

What specific health problems can poor air quality cause or worsen?

"As an allergist, I typically think of allergic diseases, such as hay fever and

asthma," says Dr. Ronald Purcell, an allergist at Cleveland Clinic in Ohio. But even eczema can worsen if pet dander or dust mites enter broken skin.

What can you do to freshen up your indoor environment for better health?

Make your home a smoke-free zone. "Secondhand smoke has been associated with increased upper respiratory infections, ear infections, nasal symptoms and rhinitis," explains Purcell. "The simple thing would be to stop smoking or smoke outside."

Keep your air-conditioning unit running efficiently. Use HEPA filters in your central air-conditioning system and change them according to the manufacturer's instructions—typically every one to three months.

"If you want to do a heavy-duty air scrubbing, turn your central system on fan mode," suggests Purcell. With central systems, the fan turns on when it's actively cooling or heating your home, he says, "but if you leave the fan on, it will continually filter the air even when the central system isn't cooling or heating the house."

Breathe easier with a humidifier.



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Left: Homedics humidifier, Item 1520272; **Right:** Danby dehumidifier, Item 1388861. Warehouses only. Both available in September.

sheets and blankets weekly. Additionally, Purcell advises keeping pets out of bedrooms to reduce pet dander where you sleep.

Invest in a quality air purifier with HEPA filter. Pay attention to the room size in which the purifier is designed to work best, matching the right purifier to the right-size room.

Remove shoes indoors. This will limit people tracking in dirt, pesticides and other pollutants into your home.

Add live plants. According to a NASA Clean Air Study, some indoor plants (such as English ivy, heartleaf philodendron and peace lily) act as natural air purifiers by absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen. They may also remove some pollutants in the air.

Choose fragrance-free cleaners. Added fragrances can be irritating to people with sensitivities. Switch to mild cleaners that don't include artificial scents.

Get rid of carpets and rugs. Soft surfaces harbor allergens like dust mites, which can be especially bothersome for kids playing on the carpet and adults with dust mite allergies, says O'Keefe. "If it's an option, replacing carpeting would be ideal," he says.

Hardwood flooring and tile have less buildup of allergens and are a lot easier to clean. An opportune time to replace carpeting would be when you're remodeling your home.

Consult with your health care provider about which remedy is best for you so you can start breathing freely once again. ■

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Control humidity in your home

High indoor humidity can make it harder to breathe. Plus, dust mites and mold thrive in moist environments, and can irritate your lungs, throat, eyes, nose and skin.

How can you control the humidity in your home?

"A central air conditioning system will automatically dehumidify the air," explains Dr. Ronald Purcell, an allergist at Cleveland Clinic in Ohio.

Aim to keep the indoor humidity around 35%. If you don't have central air conditioning, use a dehumidifier to help reduce moisture in the air.

"Once you get above 50%, dust mites will have a water source," Purcell says. "But if you go below 35%, the air gets too dry and you'll start having more respiratory symptoms."—LAB

Open (and close) windows, depending on the season. O'Keefe, a Costco member, suggests opening windows to circulate fresh air and let indoor toxins out. But on high-pollen days, keep windows closed to limit outdoor allergens getting into your home.

Vacuum frequently. This is especially important for carpeting, so use a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter. Weekly vacuuming is fine, says Purcell, since too much vacuuming can kick up a lot of allergens, making symptoms worse.

Clean and protect bedding. "Get dust mite-proof covers for mattresses and pillows," O'Keefe advises, noting you should avoid feathered bedding if you have a dust mite allergy; also, wash

Help clean the air

Help keep your indoor air clean with these products:

- Shark DuoClean Lift-Away Upright Vacuum with Self-Cleaning Brushroll. Model

UV700—perfect for pet owners. Item 2244422. Costco.com.

- GermGuardian Smart Elite 4-in-1 Air Purifier with Bonus True HEPA Filter—Smart-speaker-enabled, five speeds. Item 1449587. Warehouses/

Costco.com.

- Danby 50-Pint Dehumidifier with Pump—controls humidity in spaces up to 4,500 square feet. Item 1388861. Select warehouses/Costco.com.

—LAB