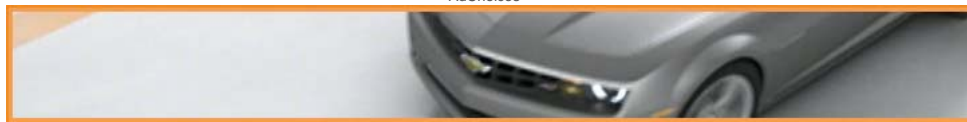



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## Beat Bad Air Days

By Katherine Bowers, Women's Health  
Thu, Oct 14, 2010

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All the major [air pollutants](#) (car exhaust, factory fumes, sidewalk smokers) are outside, right? Not so much. Indoor air may be the grimmest stuff our lungs filter each day. Studies show that things like candles, printers, and even shoes can fill your rooms with harmful contaminants, says Ted Myatt, Sc.D., an environmental scientist in Boston. But there's no need to live in a tent in your backyard—just follow these easy steps to lighten the load on your respiratory system.

#### The Pollutant: Candles

Sure, they make for a cozy ambience, but when you light one made from paraffin—as most candles are—you're potentially harming your health. Researchers at South Carolina State University found that paraffin candles emit chemicals that are linked to liver damage, neurological problems, and leukemia. They can also release a black soot that, over time, may damage your lung and heart tissue, says Jeffrey May, an expert on indoor air quality and author of *My House Is Killing Me: The Home Guide for Families with Allergies and Asthma*.

**The Solution:** Choose cleaner mood lighting in the form of electric votives, or buy 100 percent [soy](#) candles, which can burn at a slower rate and emit less soot. If you can't avoid burning paraffin, do so only occasionally and in a draft-free area. And cut out the heavily fragranced jar-style versions, says May; they produce more soot.

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#### The Pollutant: Printers

Printers spit out more than just expense reports and flight confirmations—they also spray around lots of microparticles of ink, [toner](#), and ozone, a lung irritant. A recent Australian study found that about one-third of printers are "high emitters," which means they churn out as many harmful [airborne particles](#) as you'd find on a traffic-clogged street.

**The Solution:** Set up your printer in a well-ventilated area and try to stand at least 10 feet away from it during a lengthy job (good advice for when you're at the office too). And remember to print in black-and-white whenever you can, because color ink produces more noxious debris. To see if your printer is on the high-emitter list, visit the International Laboratory for Air Quality and Health online at [www.ilqh.qut.edu.au](#).

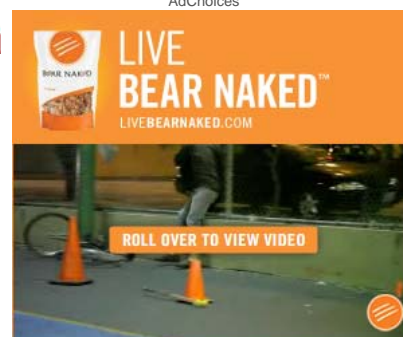
#### The Pollutant: Dust

Those gray tumbleweeds rolling around along your baseboards and under your bed are packed with [pollen](#) and zillions of your dead skin cells. They're also the first step in the food chain for dust mites and other insects (gross!) and a breeding ground for mold (grosser!). All that can spell a big [headache](#), quite literally, for women prone to allergies, says May.

**The Solution:** Sweep a vacuum with a high-energy particulate airborne (HEPA) filter over your floors once a week, and wipe all other surfaces with a clean, damp cloth

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(make sure you dampen it with water—many spray cleaners, especially those with added fragrance, contain lung-irritating chemicals). And once a month, run your bedding—pillows, comforters, quilts—through a hot dryer cycle; the high temperature will kill any dust mites.

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[How to beat back dust in your home.](#)

#### The Pollutant: Shoe Debris

When you stroll through your front door in your sneakers or stilettos, you're likely dragging in some gnarly muck. Sidewalks and lawns can be littered with lead dust, paint flecks, fertilizers, and animal waste—all of which sticks to your shoes. In fact, 80 percent of our exposure to pesticides happens indoors, thanks to tracked-in contaminants, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

**The Solution:** Dislodge clods of dirt or grass by rubbing your shoes over a durable outdoor mat (bristly coconut-husk types work best). Once inside, leave your kicks on a cloth mat by the front door.

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#### The Pollutant: Furniture

Pressed wood—also called particleboard or fiberboard—is actually little bits of wood held together by glues and resins. It's cheap (think: affordable bookcases and tables), but it may also emit formaldehyde, a preservative and suspected [carcinogen](#) that can trigger rashes, nausea, or asthma attacks, according to the EPA.

**The Solution:** Ventilate, ventilate, ventilate. "A cheap window-facing fan can clear a room's air in minutes," says May. Or consider opting for solid wood, especially for kitchen and bathroom items, since humidity amps up emissions. If you must go the pressed route, stick with plywood, which releases the fewest fumes.

#### The Pollutant: Mold

Believe it or not, a little bit of mold can be beneficial: Outdoors, it helps organic stuff decompose, says indoor-air scientist Connie Morbach. "But when those mold spores are activated by indoor [moisture](#), they can grow out of control," she explains. Excess fungus can induce unpleasant symptoms like itchy eyes and breathing problems. And a few harmful strains can attack your immune system.

**The Solution:** Indoor air that's 30 to 50 percent humidity is comfortable for you but discouraging to mold (buy a \$30 digital hygrometer at a hardware store to check your room levels). Spores love dark, damp corners, so once a week mop around your fridge, sinks, and [toilets](#) with a mild dish detergent or diluted hydrogen peroxide. Just be sure to dry everything thoroughly; mold can sprout in just 48 hours.

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