What Is A Healthy Home?

A healthy home is one that does not impact your health in the short term or the long run. We could ask one key question to assess whether your home is healthy for you or not: Do you feel better when you are away from your home?

Many factors can affect your health inside the home — dust, pets, molds, chemicals, smoking and pests. Homes can be old or new and have environmental exposures that can impact your health.

Often, we are unaware of what a healthy house is and the preventative measures we can take to ensure one. Cleaning, pest management, pet management and preventative maintenance will decrease the risk of environmental factors that could impact your health. The time of exposure is important. Generally, the longer the time an individual is exposed to a hazard, the more likely the health risk will be. The more concentrated the source and the higher the dose exposure, the greater the health risk will become. Conducting a thorough assessment of your home for environmental risks is a good idea.

We spend the majority of our time indoors: in homes, schools, workplaces and other indoor spaces. This is the air that we breathe most and where we are more likely to be exposed to any contaminants that are in the air. Many homes today do not have adequate ventilation. They are more closed up and energy-efficient and may not have adequate systems to bring fresh air into the home. And because of this lack of ventilation, pollutants can become more concentrated.

Airborne hazards such as radon, dust particles, pet dander, mold spores and chemicals enter the body by inhalation and ingestion. There are some chemicals that can enter the body through skin absorption or cuts, too.

Those at risk for environmental factors — the elderly, children and people whose health is already compromised — are especially at risk with poor indoor air quality. A normal respiratory rate for adults is about 15 breaths per minute at rest. For their size, children
breathe much more rapidly than adults. An infant may breathe about 30 breaths per minute. People with health conditions such as cystic fibrosis, cancer and other illnesses may breathe more rapidly also.

Children like to play on the floor and put their hands in their mouths. They are exploring their environment. However, dangerous substances like lead paint, toxic cleaning products, pet dander and chemicals heavier than air such as carbon monoxide, etc., not only end up on the floor, but these hazardous chemicals have much more effect on children’s brains, livers and kidneys. This is because pound-per-pound, children drink, eat and breathe more than adults and their organs and immune systems are still developing.

Children’s behavioral patterns make them more susceptible to accidents, too. Look around to see how you can “child-proof” your home such as putting locks on cabinets with cleaning products, keeping medications up out of reach and putting a barrier around a stove until the child understands not to be too close.

Also, about 60 percent of children under age 6 attend some type of child care or preschool — up to 40 hours per week — so the indoor environments at these places are important, too.

If you are on well water, you may consider getting your water tested to see what you are not able to actually see in a glass of water.

There are critical windows of exposure to physical and biological environments that can affect you — the amount that comes in contact with your body at one time and the length of time exposed. Your diet, metabolism and general health make a difference, too. Healthy homes are well-ventilated, clean and hazard free. It takes a lot of work to keep your home well maintained, but your health depends on it.

To learn more about healthy homes, consider taking a free mini workshop offered by the Cooperative Extension Service. Our Healthy Homes series takes place twice a month through summer featuring the following topics: May 18, radon; June 8, home safety; June 22, hazardous household products; July 13, green cleaning; July 27, pest management; Aug. 10, home safety for elders; and Aug. 24, water quality.

All classes start at 6 p.m. at the Tanana District Extension office, 724 27th Ave. For more information about healthy homes, go to http://bit.ly/hlthyhomes.

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