

# FEATURES

## Breathe easy

Live healthier by breathing cleaner air at home



Katelyn Richard Colorado State University | THE CONVERSATION

I have a health goal for the new year that doesn’t require me to get out of bed earlier or eat fewer cookies. I am an atmospheric chemist and will be committing to clean air at home. ● People in the United States spend as much as 90% of their lives indoors. Overall, air pollution is responsible for approximately 135,000 premature deaths per year in the United States. And levels of some chemicals can be two to five times higher in indoor air than outdoors. ● Fortunately, there are some straightforward ways to improve your home’s air quality this year, in three major categories of activity.

### Cooking

Cooking is a major source of indoor air pollution. Not all chemicals that cooking produces are bad, but some react to form other chemicals that like to clump together to form particulate matter. When inhaled, these particles enter the lungs and can then pass into the bloodstream, increasing people’s risk of heart disease and decreasing lung function.

The amount of particulate matter produced from your cooking depends on the food type, oil used and cooking temperature. High-fat-content foods, such as cheese, pork and bacon, emit the most particles, especially when cooked at high temperatures. Sunflower oil produces the least amount of particulate matter, followed by vegetable oil and then olive oil. Cooking with a gas stove produces more particulate matter than with an electric stove, and the gas stove also emits other hazardous chem-

icals such as nitrogen dioxide and benzene. Two simple and effective measures to keep kitchen air clean and prevent particulate matter from spreading through the home are using your range hood fan and opening nearby windows while cooking. The suction will move harmful chemicals out of your home and away from your lungs, and the fresh air will dilute what remains.

See CLEAN AIR, Page 8B

ILLUSTRATION BY KATHERINE SILVIA/USATODAY NETWORK; GETTY IMAGES

## How to clean the items that clean your house

Cody Godwin  
USA TODAY

The toilets are scrubbed, the dishes are washed and the floors are spotless. But the house cleaning isn’t over yet – it’s time to clean your cleaning tools. Sponges, brooms, mops and toilet brushes work hard around our homes, but if they’re not clean, they aren’t as efficient as they can be. Some of the gunk and debris on these items are obvious, but there’s more dirt and germs lurking where we can’t see. Items that get into the nitty-gritty, like toilet brushes and mops, should be properly cleaned and dried after each use, whereas items like brooms and sponges can go a little longer without needing a deep clean.

### How to clean a broom

Brooms only need to be cleaned about every three months. You can easily clean the handle with a thorough pass using a disinfecting wipe.



Mops and brooms need to be cleaned regularly. PROBLEMSOLVED/USA TODAY NETWORK

The bristles need a little more work. Many brush heads can be unscrewed or twisted off the handle for easier cleaning. Start by removing the obvious stuff: dirt, hair and dust bunnies. Next, put the brush head in a mix of warm water, bleach and dish soap. Gently sweep it back and forth to get the bristles wet before letting it soak for 30 minutes. The broom head should not be submerged in the water – just the bot-

tom half of the bristles. Rinse it and let it dry outside in a sunny spot.

### How to clean a mop head

If your mop water is dirty by the time you finish your floors, just imagine how dirty your mop head is. The best time to clean your mop is right after you finish mopping. Empty the dirty water bucket, rinse it out and replace it with clean, hot water. Add a splash of vinegar and let the mop soak for five minutes. Rinse it with clean water and dump the dirty water down the toilet – not the sink. To sanitize the mop, soak it in equal parts bleach and water for 15 minutes. Give it a thorough rinse to remove all the bleach and let it dry completely.

### How to clean a toilet brush

The best time to clean a toilet brush is right after you clean the toilet bowl. Hold the brush over the bowl and pour disinfectant over it. Let it soak in a

mixture of disinfectant and water for five minutes. Flush the toilet to rinse the brush, and swish it in the clean water. Let the brush air-dry completely before storing. A simple way to do this is to rest the handle between the bowl and toilet seat so the brush is suspended and any drips fall into the toilet. How to clean sponges, dish brush Sponges should be cleaned once a week and replaced every 2-3 weeks. Sponges and dish brushes are often kept moist, which makes them the perfect vessels for harboring bacteria or growing mold. Thoroughly rinse them, wring out sponges after each use and let them air-dry in an open space. You can also pat brushes on towels or paper towels to expedite the drying process. To disinfect a sponge, soak it in bleach for five minutes and thoroughly rinse with clean water. For a faster solution, throw your sponge and dishwasher-safe brush in the dishwasher on the sanitize setting.