

YOUR HEALTH

Sweep Your House Clean of Toxins

YOU MAY THINK your home is a safe haven, but many everyday household products, from floor cleaners to moth balls, may give off unsafe levels of toxic pollutants. Depending on how they are used, some products contain chemicals that could cause headaches and fatigue or aggravate allergies and asthma, according to scientific research. Some products contain carcinogens. Older adults are particularly susceptible.

Don't head to your bed in despair (it may have dust mites). There are steps that you can take to "detox" your home. "Every product that is toxic in the home has a safer alternative," says Debra Dadd, author of *Home Safe Home* (Tarcher, \$20). Dadd offers tips on detoxing a home on her Web site (www.dld123.com).

■ **Clean green.** A growing number of companies are selling chemical-free floor and toilet-bowl cleaners, furniture polish and laundry detergents. Many are made from fruit- and vegetable-based ingredients.

However, not all "green" products are completely toxin-free, so read labels carefully. And consumers have noted that you may have to do a bit more scrubbing with green products than with more-potent cleaners.

You can buy natural cleaning supplies at most grocery stores. You can find links to online shopping sites at New American Dream (www.newdream.com, click "Conscious Consumer") and Co-op American (www.coopamerica.org/programs, click "Responsible Shopper").

You can also make your own cleaning solutions, says Annie Bond, author of *Home Enlightenment: Create a Nurturing, Healthy, and Toxin-Free Home* (Rodale, \$20). She makes a soft-scrubbing gel by mixing baking soda and a little liquid detergent.

■ **Pitch the pesticides.** Older adults account for a disproportionate number of deaths due to pesticide poisoning, according to the federal Environmental Protection Agency. Exposure could lead to headaches, dizziness and muscle twitching, the government warns.

Drop the monthly exterminator contracts, and use an exterminator only when you have a severe pest

problem. Find an exterminator that uses non-toxic products. Dadd suggests finding cracks where bugs are entering the house and patch those spots with non-toxic glue. For more ideas, go to www.npic.orst.edu, www.pesticides.org and www.beyondpesticides.org.

■ **Toss the mothballs.** Mothballs are made with pesticides. Bond suggests making a moth-repellant sachet by mixing dried rosemary, mint, thyme, ginger and cloves. Cedar products are also effective moth repellants. (For Bond's sachet recipe and other tips, go to www.care2.com/greenliving, click "Ask Annie.")

■ **Choose your plastics.** Many plastics use the chemical bisphenol-A, which has been shown to cause neurological and developmental damage to lab animals. Avoid polycarbonate plastics, which have #3, #6 or #7 on the bottom of the containers. Polyethylene plastic is safe; these containers are marked by #1, #2, #4 and #5.

■ **Grow houseplants.** Spider plants and fig trees reduce formaldehyde in the air. English ivy helps to tackle the air-pollution impact of petroleum-based products. Aloe vera, chrysanthemums, Chinese evergreen, bamboo palm and lilies also help clean indoor air.

■ **Go HEPA.** "High efficiency particulate air" filters, vacuum cleaners, air purifiers and dehumidifiers can prevent mold. HEPA products trap tiny particles that cause problems for allergy sufferers. If you don't use HEPA filters, make sure you regularly change or clean the filters in heaters and air-conditioners.

■ **Remake your bed.** Labels on bedding such as "permanent press," "no iron," "water repellent" and "flame retardant" may indicate fabric treatments that give off chemicals. You can switch to organic bedding, made from organic cotton and other natural fibers. Most department stores and many Web sites sell these products. Consider encasing your mattresses, box springs and pillows in dust-mite barriers. If you have allergies, you can replace carpets and rugs with organic wool, bamboo, cotton, sisal or cork. For hardwood floors, use a non-toxic finish. Or use ceramic tiles. **K** — **LEAH DOBKIN**

