



NICOLE BIJLSMA

HOME HEALTH EXPERT

Nicole is a building biologist, naturopath and acupuncturist with more than 20 years' experience. She established the Australian College of Environmental Studies, and is also an author, regular public speaker and TV guest

It was while I was working as a naturopath and acupuncturist more than 20 years ago that I began to notice the connection between many of my patients' ill health and their homes. I was also trying to figure out why I was experiencing multiple miscarriages.

After much investigating, I believe it was due to me sleeping in a high electromagnetic field. This is one of the things I assess as a building biologist. I also take air and water samples, examine mould, and do other tests to check a home's health.

Based on all that I've seen and learnt, these would be my seven steps to creating a healthy home.

1 Use a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter and motorised head Not having a HEPA filter exacerbates exposure to allergens such as mould, house dust mites and dander by causing them to become airborne. Investing in a good vacuum cleaner is important to establishing a healthy home for children, and is critical if anybody suffers from asthma or allergies. The most effective way to reduce the dust load in carpets is to spend four minutes vacuuming per square metre, followed by one minute per square metre every other week.



2 Use the air and sun, not chemicals, to keep your home fresh Avoid air fresheners and artificial fragrances as many are lung irritants that may also contain hormone disrupting chemicals. Instead, open windows as often as you can (unless you live in an area with severe air pollution). Regularly use the sun to air chopping boards, soft toys, pillows and mattresses, pet bedding and other fabric furnishings.

3 Address mould issues right away Mould can cause serious health issues. Forget using bleach as it's a food source for some fungi. Instead focus on where the moisture is coming from such as roof and plumbing leaks or inadequate drainage. Wipe existing mould with a damp microfibre cloth that's been soaked in an 80:20 solution of white vinegar to water. If visible mould covers an area in excess of one square metre get it investigated by an accredited mould remediator.

4 Use microfibre cloths Follow this with a clean and dry tea towel to dust and to reduce the microbial load in the home. This will reduce the need to use chemicals, many of which are known skin and lung

irritants. When you've finished, rinse the cloth in warm water to release the particles and leave it to dry before reuse. Put the cloths in the washing machine at the end of each week.

5 Swap plastic for glass, stainless-steel and lead-free ceramics In 1987, scientists discovered that hormone-altering chemicals leaching from plastic test tubes caused a rapid growth in breast cancer cells. Plastics to avoid for food and drink storage are polyvinyl chloride (plastic number 3), polystyrene (6) and polycarbonate (7). Also avoid pewter, highly coloured ceramics or those with a corroded glaze, and leaded crystal due to its lead content.

6 Keep gadgets away from your bed These can affect your levels of melatonin, a powerful antioxidant produced in the brain that promotes sleep, regulates the body clock and protects against genetic damage. Gadgets to be wary of include an electric oven or fridge on the other side of the wall, and digital clock radios and wireless items such as mobile phones by the bed.

Don't wear shoes in the home This significantly reduces the dust, which contains agents from various allergens. Dander, the skin cells from humans and pets, can account for up to 90 per cent. However, it can also include dust mites and pollen; chemicals like pesticides, flame retardants and solvents; particles such as food, dirt and fabric; insulation fibres, asbestos and lead (in houses that were built pre-1970); and bacteria.



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