

Healthy Home Tips for Homeowners



Arlington/Fairfax/Falls Church

1. **Check your clothes dryer vent.** Clogged dryer vents are a leading cause of fire and a major moisture problem. Turn your dryer ON and go outside to make sure you have free airflow. Remove any lint, and make sure the “flapper” is working. If your dryer is vented with white plastic accordion duct, consider replacing it with rigid metal duct, which is much safer.
2. **Check your gutters on a rainy day.** Gutters and downspouts are intended to divert water away from your home. Your gutters may be clogged, your downspouts may dump next to your home, or water may be puddling against your foundation due to poor grading. Take these problems seriously. Moisture is the root of many evils in homes, and these fixes are usually simple.
3. **Ensure your smoke and Carbon Monoxide detectors are working.** Unless your detectors are “hard-wired” (rather than battery-powered), buy detectors with a 10-year battery. Smoke detectors are a must, and homes with gas appliances or an attached garage need CO detectors. Contact your local fire department to inquire about smoke and CO detector installation and home safety check programs.
4. **Make sure your fire extinguisher is easy to reach.** If your fire extinguisher is buried under your kitchen sink, that defeats its purpose. Invest in a small fire extinguisher and keep it handy.
5. **Make sure your stairs are safe.** Your stairs should be free of tripping hazards, with treads and railings that are stable and secure. Would a second railing on the other side make you safer?
6. **Change your furnace filter, and cover the filter slot.** To protect air quality in your home, change your filter every 2-3 months, and choose a higher quality filter to capture smaller particles. If the slot where the filter goes is open, then air is bypassing your filter. FilterLock, a plastic cover which attaches with magnets, provides a simple solution for about \$8.
7. **Get rid of nasty old carpeting,** which collects mold, mildew, fungi, dust mites, pet dander, and pesticide residue. Do your lungs a favor by installing “smooth and cleanable” tile or laminate.
8. **Stop wasting energy on hot water.** If your hot water is scalding hot, adjust the thermostat on your water heater to a maximum of 120 degrees F.
9. **Check your attic hatch for air leaks.** Gaps around attic hatches are the #1 energy waster in many homes. If you have pull-down attic stairs, or just a rectangular access panel, look for gaps around the edges. Spending \$10 on weather stripping might cut your utility bills \$100 a year.
10. **Check your foundation and siding for gaps, cracks and holes.** Sealing such openings with caulk or mortar keeps out moisture and pests, and saves energy by reducing air leaks.
11. **Remove ivy and prune shrubs away from your home.** This helps keep out moisture and pests.
12. **Make sure your house numbers are visible from the street** to help firefighters and EMT crews.