



Your Healthy Home: Cleaning Tips and Tricks

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If your family is like ours, no one is excited to have "cleaning" on the top of their to do list. It is easy to procrastinate because there are so many other things that we want to do. So let's talk a little bit about actually keeping things clean as you go about your daily routine, and some tips and tricks on cleaning in general.

Here's a trick question: When is the best time to clean a shower? Answer: When you're still in it! Look at it this way: you're already all wet, the shower (or tub) is already all wet - why not keep a small brush in there with you, and a squeegee if your shower has glass panels - once a week brush up the surfaces at the end of your shower, squeegee, and then when you're done, towel the surfaces clean and shiny (yes, your towel then goes in the laundry).

You can perform a similar trick with your refrigerator - you know it's a pain to clean the refrigerator - everything comes out on to the counter, you are rushing to wash down the surfaces with the warm soapy water the manual tells you to use . . . the food is sitting out and getting warm . . . what a mess. Instead, every week or so, pick one small area to clean - remove the items just from that area and wipe down the interior - put the stuff back in, and that section is done. Rotate areas every week and your refrigerator will always be clean and neat. This technique also works for the freezer areas.

I don't know if the following works on bed bugs, but it does work on dust mites, which are teeming inside those "dust bunnies" rolling under your bed . . . in addition to weekly vacuuming and dusting, once a month you can load your comforters and pillows into the dryer and run them on as high a setting as the label says you can (and IF the label says you can) - this will roll all the dust and pollen and other "stuff" out your vent to the outside.

Do you have one bathroom sink drain in the house that clogs up about every 3 months? I'll bet this drain is the one you use most often - the one you wash your hands in after you put that shiny pomade on your hair (hair goes down the drain); the one that you rinse the comb in (hair goes down the drain); the one you brush your teeth over (toothpaste down the drain); the one you wash the bottom of your shoes in (yes, people do this); the one you floss over and sometimes the floss goes down the drain; you get the picture. Where does all this stuff go? Sometimes it does not leave the drain, rather it sits in what we call the "P Trap" . . . this is the U

shaped thing under the sink that takes what you put down the drain to the sewer, or, in our case, our septic tank. It is U-shaped because we want a little water sitting in the bottom of that "U" so that we don't have to smell what is in our septic tank. The only problem is, this water "trap" collects all these solids coming down the drain (including your wedding ring or earrings, OOPS!) and then creates a gummy gooey mess out of everything.

No problem, you say, I have a can of DRANO! But hold on. Even DRANO will have a hard time clearing this goop from your P Trap, and it's not good for your septic system or for your plumbing. So here's how to clean your P Trap. This is also how to retrieve your rings and earrings when (not if) they fall down the drain.

If you look under your bathroom sink you will discover that some smart plumber figured out that we might need to actually remove or clean our P traps regularly. Look at the U shaped pipe. If your home was built in the last 40 years, you'll see white PVC pipe. Now look at the fittings. These are actually designed to be removed by hand! No wrenches. Great. If you see anything else, or you see metal, then you need to regroup and find a professional.

Get a small bucket or towel, because the trap will have water in it. Now twist the fittings off - you should be able to turn them by hand - they have right hand threads just like a bottle top - envision looking down on the connection and your hand is at the top - right tightens and left loosens - the trap will drop off and you can now empty the gunk out of it, including the earrings you couldn't find. NOTE: If the fittings don't budge, you can use channel lock pliers gently on them. Make sure you're turning in the right direction!

Use a brush and some hot soapy water and clean out the trap. Now re-install - hand tight is fine - run some hot water down the drain and make sure you tightened the fittings enough - and you'll have a clean drain, a well running sink, and the smugness of knowing you can now retrieve your jewelry without calling a plumber.

NOTE: If this procedure did not unclog your sink drain, then guess what - time to consult a professional! Drain snakes and air blowers are the next solution tools. Drain cleaners should always be a last resort - in spite of what the bottle says, they are not good for your plumbing or for the environment.

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