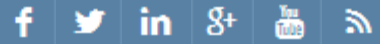


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Better Healthcare Newsletter from Patrick Malone



Dear Jessica,

In many households, it's the season for a spring freshening. So this month, we focus on how to make your home as healthy as possible by cleaning up the hidden hazards.

Get the lead out—and other ways
to make your home healthier, safer

IN THIS ISSUE

Get the lead out--and other ways to make your home healthier

A healthy house is safe, too

Will spring fix-up plans take into account owners' needs in autumn years?

BY THE NUMBERS

1 in 4

Number of respondents who expressed concern in a recent Harvard survey about living in a healthy home

\$1.5 billion

Estimated cost (high-end) to deal with lead problems in the Flint, Mich. water supply



The headlines have blared about [lead pollution of the water in Flint, Mich.](#), [formaldehyde risks from flooring imported from China](#), and a "third wave" of patients afflicted with illnesses linked to [asbestos](#). "Can't happen in my house," you say? Well, let's get informed first before dismissing potential health woes tied to your biggest investment. Remediation of serious issues may require expert help. But ignoring them can be risky or even deadly. Healthy houses, experts say, eliminate, minimize, or control such risks as:

LEAD

This common element has been used in houses since ancient times. The soft metal's dangers have been known almost as long, with the Romans recording [how lead exposure contributed to paralysis, delirium, sterility, and palsy](#). In recent times, public health officials have expressed great alarm about lead in paints and plumbing, and how exposure can harm children and their development. As the federal [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention points out](#): "No safe blood lead level in children has been identified. Even low levels of lead in blood have been shown to affect IQ, ability to pay attention, and academic achievement. And effects of lead exposure cannot be corrected."

Although the Flint crisis has focused national attention on lead's dangers in our water—a [huge problem for schools and municipalities](#)—experts underscore that lead paints pose persistent health risks in tens of millions of older homes.

700

Estimated number of lung cancer cases in Virginia connected to radon exposure.

43%

Percent of fatal falls nationally that are ladder-related

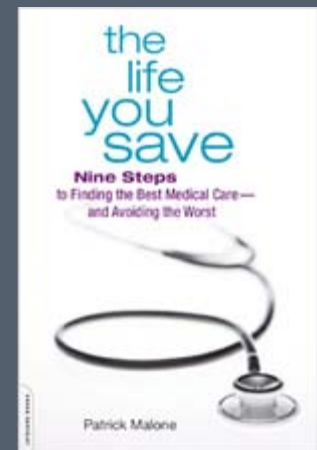
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[The life you save](#)

[Nine Steps to Finding the Best Medical Care — and Avoiding the Worst](#)



LEARN MORE



Although the [federal government banned lead in paints in 1978](#), they were applied in many homes before that date. If you let old paint get and stay damp, then to chip and peel, that can expose layers underneath with lead content. Homeowners also can inadvertently expose old lead in paint when prepping projects involving areas like walls, windows, sills, doors, stairs, and porches. Those who don't sweep or vacuum often may allow dust with lead in it (from interiors and from tainted areas outdoors), to build up.

Awareness is a key to dealing with lead hazards, experts say. Governments can provide information about risks, regulations, and resources. In the District of Columbia, after [considerable criticism](#) of its efforts, the [Department of Energy and Environment](#) offers assistance. So, too, do [Baltimore](#), the [state of Maryland](#), [county governments](#) and the [state of Virginia](#).

For those concerned about [lead's taint in water](#), federal authorities recommend delving into annual data that systems must provide: the Consumer Confidence Report. These reports provide detailed, scientific data on water quality and challenges that providers confront in offering safe, healthy supplies.

Homeowners may need to hire trained contractors to assist with painting or plumbing jobs where lead's an issue; they may wish to hire specialists [to test for lead](#) in the household. Concerned parents may wish to [consult their pediatrician to see whether a blood test for lead exposure would be wise](#).

ASBESTOS

This [group of minerals](#), which occur in nature as bundles of fibers, resist heat, fire, and they do not conduct electricity. They were common in insulation, roofing, fireproofing, drywall, for sound absorption products, and for ceiling and floor tiles.

Research has shown that exposure to asbestos, which can become airborne as tiny fibers, harms the lungs, especially with

Read our Patient Safety Blog, which has news and practical advice from the frontlines of medicine for how to become a smarter, healthier patient.



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Sexual health for you and your Valentine

The dish on healthier, tastier eating in 2016

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the scarring disease known as [asbestosis](#); asbestos also is notorious for causing lung cancer and [mesothelioma](#).

Homeowners [should use care in remodeling projects](#) that disturb walls, ceilings, and insulation—notably around old boilers, furnaces, and on long runs of pipe—as asbestos-containing products were common in older construction. Asbestos isn't easy to detect; homeowners may need to [call in an inspector for help and lab testing](#) of suspect materials. Remodelers may need to call in trained contractors for abatement, projects that can involve sealing off areas, donning protective gear, using air cleaning equipment, and special hauling and disposal of materials.

The U.S. EPA has banned and restricted asbestos in various products; many governments, including the [District of Columbia](#), [Maryland](#) and [Virginia](#) regulate abatement programs and contractors.

RADON

This is an [odorless, colorless, invisible gas](#) that results from the breakdown of naturally occurring uranium in soil, rock, and water all over the United States. It has been identified as a major cause of cancer—the second leading cause of lung cancer and a prime cause of lung cancer in individuals who never smoked.

Radon seeps up from the ground and permeates homes and other structures. Its levels can vary from house to house. Homeowners in [known problem areas](#) can [get their homes tested](#)—this should be a key part of the purchase inspection.

Homeowners [with serious radon problems](#) may wish to work with trained contractors for remediation, including installing systems to vent the gas from beneath a home.

Governments offer radon resources and regulation, including in [Virginia](#), [Maryland](#), and [the District of Columbia](#). Radon can also be a problem in [drinking water](#), though this is a [less prominent concern](#).

MOLD

Water and dampness drive home experts to distraction, partly because they can lead to mold growth. [As the CDC observes](#): “Some people are sensitive to molds [which for them] can cause nasal stuffiness, throat irritation, coughing or wheezing, eye irritation, or, in some cases, skin irritation. People with mold allergies may have more severe reactions. Immune-compromised people and people with chronic lung illnesses, such as obstructive lung disease, may get serious infections in their lungs.” Molds also can be problematic for those with asthma.

Because they're naturally occurring and ubiquitous, it's tough to keep molds out of the house. [Different varieties](#) (*Cladosporium*, *Penicillium*, *Aspergillus*, and *Alternaria*) fester indoors and cause concern. *Stachybotrys chartarum*, greenish-black, proliferates on high-cellulose, low-nitrogen materials--fiberboard, gypsum board, paper, dust, and lint; this is the "black mold" that [unsettles homeowners](#).

They need to be wary of water sources that encourage molds. Bathrooms, with leaks and high humidity, need proper venting and hygienic upkeep. Maintenance woes can [sprout into serious mold problems](#) due to plumbing leaks and bad drainage—from blocked gutters, damaged roofs, defective pipes. Big mold problems burst forth after calamities, like deluges, hurricanes, and floods.

Cutting off problem-causing moisture is a key first step. Homeowners [can tackle some mold clean up](#), but they should protect themselves from health risks. If mold problems are widespread and severe, homeowners may need to call in [trained contractors](#).

Besides creating mold problems, dampness also can encourage insect (roach) infestations. Medical experts in Los Angeles have found that the [combination of mold, dust, and vermin-related](#)

issues make it hard to improve kids' health in substandard housing.

FORMALDEHYDE

This is a colorless, flammable, strong-smelling chemical. It can be found in pressed-wood products (particleboard, plywood, and fiberboard), glues and adhesives, permanent-press fabrics, paper product coatings, and some insulation materials. It is used as an industrial fungicide, germicide, and disinfectant.

When the chemical vaporizes and collects, it can make people sick if they breathe a lot of it. They get sore throats, coughs, scratchy eyes, and nosebleeds. The CDC says formaldehyde: "is known to cause cancer (especially) of the nose and throat. Scientific research has not yet shown that a certain level of formaldehyde exposure causes cancer. However, the higher the level and the longer the exposure, the greater the chance of getting cancer."

Regulators already had banned insulation panels with formaldehyde risks. New concern grew after news reports on TV's "60 Minutes" and other outlets about formaldehyde-emitting flooring from China.

That has prompted U.S. health officials to test some products' safety. They also have reissued reminders about double-checking building and other products (furniture and draperies), and whether they may pose formaldehyde risks. Congress has ordered the federal Environmental Protection Agency to put out new rules this year on emissions from composite wood products.

Speaking of airborne woes, many homeowners now try to reduce health risks from VOCs, aka volatile organic compounds. As the EPA notes: "VOCs are emitted by a wide array of products numbering in the thousands. Organic chemicals are widely used as ingredients in household products. Paints, varnishes and wax all contain organic solvents, as do many cleaning, disinfecting, cosmetic, de-greasing and hobby products. Fuels are made up of

organic chemicals. All of these products can release organic compounds....”

The harm that VOCs can cause varies, depending on the duration and extent of exposure, as well as the substance involved. They prompt more concern these days because so many homes are sealed tight, better than ever before. The health-wise approach is to avoid VOCs by choosing paints and solvents carefully; savvy homeowners learn how properly to store and to dispose of cleaners, paints, fuels and other hazardous materials that can accumulate around the house.

By the way, it goes without saying that smoking, and the risks of second-hand smoke, can really make homes unhealthy, right?

Here's hoping that you don't encounter any of these domestic banes, and that you and yours have a great spring in a very healthy home!

A healthy house is safe, too



A healthy home also is a safe one. So homeowners, be careful and:

- If you're not really handy, consider the very real injury risks of ladders and power tools; think twice about taking on ambitious DIY projects. Remember, an emergency room visit's cost averages around \$2,000.
- Beware of electrocution and electrical dangers in the house.

Will spring fix-up plans take into account owners' needs in autumn years?



When it comes to home projects, and not just for spring, older Americans have become the big spenders, putting out half of today's home improvement dollars. Many of these baby boomer remodelers seek to ensure their homes add to their well-being as they get older, as part of a movement that seeks to foster successful "aging in place."

It needs to be a comprehensive consideration not only of seniors' homes but also the services and supports that exist around them—for easy transportation, health care, caregiving, and

- Look hard at your [home's fire safety](#), especially alarms (for both smoke and carbon monoxide), extinguishers, emergency exits and escape routes, as well as whether the kitchen's as fire-proof as possible.
- Check that [kids can't get at toxic or poisonous](#) substances in your house. Ensure that your house also is [safeguarded against your children's choking](#) risks.
- Scout out your house to [decrease the dangers posed by falls](#).

provision of items like groceries, shopping, entertainments.

It can start with basics like [tweaks around the house to help avoid falls](#). It could be bathroom improvements, not just installing grab bars but changing out a tub for a bigger, more accessible shower with a seat, and replacing sinks and toilets so they are lower and easier to reach.

In the kitchen, seniors similarly may want lower counters, different and easier to grasp door and cabinet knobs and handles, and stoves and refrigerators that are easier to access, too.

Although they may own multistory homes, older Americans may want to ensure that the main floor of their residence includes a bedroom and a bathroom.

They may look at their home entries to see if they are easy to navigate, and if ramps can be added or can replace stairs. Those who can afford to do so may add elevators or stair lifts.

Seniors may improve the lighting throughout their residences, also adding easier to handle switches and photosensitive devices to switch lights on automatically at dusk and dawn.

If they are tech savvy, they may [take advantage of the "Internet of things,"](#) so they can gain voice control of lighting and heating systems, and, someday soon, how they cook their food (responsive stoves or microwave units) and keep supplies of their food (smart refrigerators that can contact stores to restock items). Seniors' kids and caregivers also may push them to install monitoring and alarm systems.

Recent Health Care Blog Posts

Here are some recent posts on our patient safety blog that might interest you.

- [The flood of advertisements for costly drugs and medical devices is raising concern](#) among health care experts, the New York Times reports. Experts fear that the \$14 billion in annual ad spending by Big Pharma and medical device makers only "increases

prices and encourages patients to seek out more expensive and, often, inappropriate treatment.” Big Pharma, medical device makers, and hospitals not only are spending greatly more in actual dollars but also in percentage terms, the Times says: Big Pharma’s ad spend is up 46 percent over the last four year; it’s up by 38 percent for hospitals, medical centers, and clinics, and medical and dental insurers.

- Uncle Sam has sent one of the sternest messages possible to doctors nationwide that they must [slash their dispensing of powerful prescription pain-killers](#). These drugs, for which doctors wrote 249 million prescriptions in 2013, have been blamed in 165,000 fatal overdoses between 1999 and 2014, more than 420,000 emergency room visits in 2013, and the addiction or abuse by almost 2 million Americans in 2012.
- Can the sleaze get any worse with the maker of a dirty medical device that investigators say sickened dozens and played a role in killing 21? Sadly, it can. Federal prosecutors say that the maker of a flexible scope used in endoscopic exams will pay [\\$623.2 million to settle criminal and civil charges](#) over its payment of kickbacks to unnamed physicians and hospitals. The penalties were the largest ever levied under U.S. anti-kickback laws. The company, according to the criminal complaint, forked out kickbacks to bring in \$600 million in sales of endoscopes and other medical equipment, earning it more than \$230 million in gross profits.
- The National Football League may have taken a page from Big Tobacco’s playbook, and played [fast and loose with data used in “scientific studies”](#) to downplay players’ risks from concussions, a New York Times investigation finds. The Times scrutinized the underlying information the league and its top officials provided to researchers on five years of its athletes’ concussion-related injuries. This data became the basis for 13 peer-reviewed studies that the league relied on as a public relations shield against mounting evidence that head trauma posed significant short- and long-term harm to players. But, the newspaper said, the league left out roughly 10 percent of the head injuries that occurred in the study period (1996-2001). The omissions were blatant because they were hugely public and affected NFL superstars like quarterbacks Troy Aikman, Steve Young, and Kurt Warner.

HERE’S TO A HEALTHY 2016!

Sincerely,



Patrick Malone

Patrick Malone & Associates

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