

5 Quick Ways to Reduce Health Effects of Cleaning



1. Use a less irritating product.

- Read labels. Look for products **without words like “warning”, “irritant”, or “avoid contact”**.
- Learn the difference between disinfectants and general cleaners.
 - Disinfectants** → kill microorganisms (certain bacteria and viruses)
 - General cleaners** → remove surface contaminants like soil and grease
- Active ingredients in disinfectants—like bleach (sodium hypochlorite)—can cause the most health effects.
- Fragrances can be irritating. The smell of “clean” is no smell at all.

2. Clean smarter.

- Use disinfectants only when necessary (for example, if a client has a compromised immune system, infections like C. Diff or MRSA, or other special medical needs).
- Use your knowledge to decide which areas need to be cleaned with a cleaning product each time, and which areas could be cleaned less often or without a cleaner—like wiping mirrors with a damp cloth.
- Don’t mix bleach and ammonia. Toxic vapors are produced when these two products are mixed.

3. Change the way you use cleaning products.

- Wear gloves to protect your skin. If recommended on the label, wear eye protection.
- Don’t use more product than you need. More product doesn’t make the surface cleaner.
- Wipe the product off immediately unless the product label says you need to leave a product on a surface for a specified time.
- Spray into your cleaning cloth and wipe the surface you’re cleaning. If that’s not possible, spray and wipe small areas. Avoid spraying large areas all at once. This reduces the amount of product in the air and that you breathe in.

4. Fresh air matters.

- Open windows or use fans to get fresh air, especially in small spaces like bathrooms.
- Avoid spending long periods of time in spaces where you’ve recently used cleaning products.

5. Listen to your own body.

- If you have headaches, eye or skin irritation, or difficulty breathing after using a product, switch products. Different products have different active ingredients and you may be able to find milder products.
- You may be bothered by a product that other aides find non-irritating, so notice what affects you.
- Breathing problems, headaches, and eye, nose, or skin irritation should not be part of your job. You can make changes to improve your health.

***For more information on cleaning-related topics in home health care, see our fact sheets at:
www.uml.edu/SafeHCFactSheets***

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