How Healthy Is Your Bathroom?

Yes, you need to nix the ick factor and zap germs—but a few simple steps can also save you from allergies, sickness, and falls. Follow our plan for a clean, safe, and happy space.

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PHOTOGRAPHED BY
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Focus on the faucets (germy hot spots).

Air out the room—a so-easy way to get rid of mold.

Don’t end up on your butt! Get a nonslip rug.

? did you know
IF YOUR TOWEL SMELLS MILDEWY, THAT MEANS IT’S GROWING ENOUGH MOLD TO CAUSE AN ALLERGIC REACTION. POP THE STINKER IN THE MACHINE AND WASH IT ON HOT TO KILL THE YUCKY STUFF.
1. KEEP TOWELS FRESH
Here's a good reason to hang them up to dry instead of leaving towels in a damp heap (listen up, lazy hubby): The longer they sit around wet, the more time germs from your skin have a chance to multiply—not exactly what you want right after scrubbing yourself clean.

2. SHINE UP YOUR SINK
"If your sink looks clean, it's probably safe and healthy," says Donna Duberg, an assistent professor in the Department of Biomedical Laboratory Science at Saint Louis University. The faucet handles, though, need special attention: Research found that they may have twice the amount of coliform bacteria (which could include fecal germs) than your toilet seat. A weekly two-second cleaning with disinfectant wipes will stave off bacteria.

3. STAY ON YOUR FEET!
Women of all ages suffer from 72% more bathroom falls than men do, per research from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). The biggest risk? Getting out of the shower, so make sure you have a nonslip rug to step onto. (Bonus if it feels soft and luxurious under tootsies.) The CDC also recommends that everyone install a grab bar both inside and outside the shower for more stability—no, they're not just for old folks!

4. D Germ THE CURTAIN
Your pretty fabric shower curtain can last for years, as long as you wash it every six months to rinse off dust, it's the inner liner curtain that needs more attention, says Kelly Reynolds, Ph.D., program director of Environmental and Occupational Health at the University of Arizona. Over time a biofilm builds up on it—a grimy coating of bacteria, mold, and yeast that can become airborne with shower steam and trigger allergies, respiratory or skin infections, and even stomach bugs if inhaled, Reynolds warns. Spray the liner down with a bleach product once a week to clear off invisible biofilms. If black spots show up and won't budge, it's time to buy a fresh one.

5. LET SOME AIR IN
Crack a window or flip on the vent while you shower to bring down the humidity and boost air quality, suggests Janice Nolen, assistant vice president of national policy at the American Lung Association. Moisture grows mold, fungi, and bacteria—and studies show that dampness alone can aggravate breathing issues like asthma and allergies. "You'll kill 90% of mold and bacteria just by drying out the room," says Reynolds. (And hey, less humidity means less frizzy hair!)

6. GO FOR MOOD LIGHTING
Make your bathroom a Zen zone during the morning rush by installing the right kind of energy-efficient LED or CFL bulbs. Look for those labeled "soft white" or 2700K. "Their golden light gives you a calmer start to your day," says Sally Augustin, Ph.D., an environmental psychologist and founder of Design with Science. Need more energy than calm? Pick up a "bright white" bulb.

DON'T FORGET TO ...

Suds Up Your Soap
Whether it's bar or liquid, keep your soap germ-free. "It's something you never think to clean—hello, it's soap!" says Reynolds. But if it's contaminated with bacteria, your hands will be too. Swipe liquid pumps with a sanitizing wipe once a week. Let bars air-dry in a dish where bugs won't fest.

Treat Your Toothbrush Right
While microorganisms can grow on toothbrushes, they're unlikely to make you sick, says the American Dental Association. Still, replace your brush every few months and store it in an upright position to speed drying. Forget the toothbrush cover (dark = damp = germs!)

Burn Candles Safely
Like to light a candle while you do the relaxing bath thing? Open a window or turn on the vent; otherwise, indoor air pollution (yes, even from that little wisp of smoke) can build up and irritate lungs.