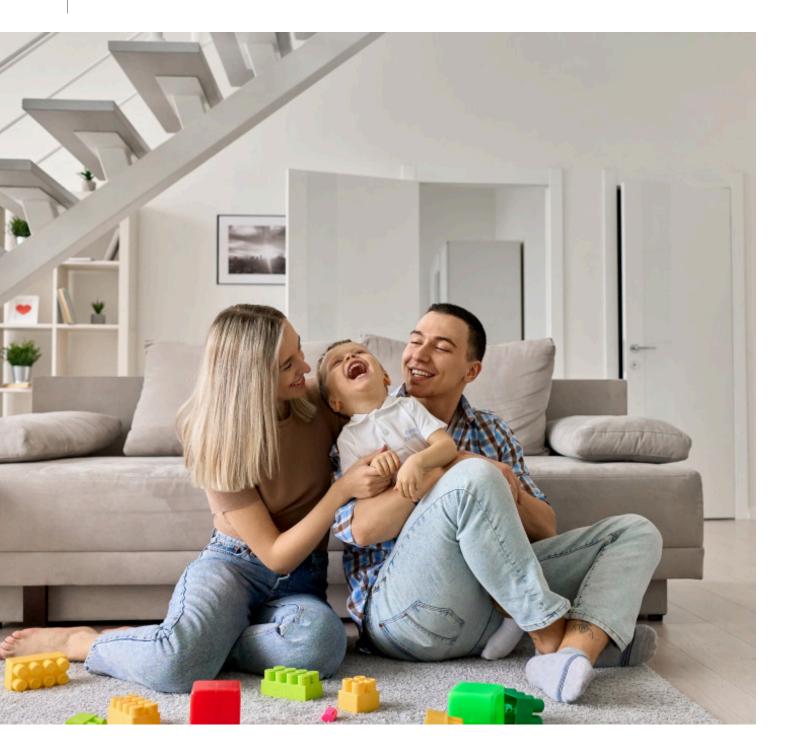
## Guide to Create a Healthy Home Environment

To Improve Well-Being



By Louis - The University of Melbourne

### Abstract

Creating a healthy home environment in Melbourne is essential for improving overall well-being. With the city's dynamic lifestyle, a serene and clean living space can help reduce stress, boost mental health, and enhance productivity. A well-organized home with good ventilation, natural light, and clutter-free areas promotes physical health and emotional balance. Adding indoor plants and maintaining cleanliness can improve air quality and create a calming atmosphere. Prioritizing eco-friendly practices, such as reducing waste and conserving energy, further supports sustainable living. A healthy home environment not only nurtures personal growth but also contributes to a harmonious and happy lifestyle in Melbourne.

### 1. Introduction

In Melbourne's bustling urban lifestyle, creating a healthy home environment is crucial for enhancing overall well-being. Your home should be a sanctuary that promotes relaxation, positivity, and good health. From embracing natural light and improving air quality to organizing spaces and incorporating eco-friendly practices, small changes can make a significant difference. A healthy living space not only reduces stress but also fosters physical and mental wellness. This guide provides practical tips to transform your Melbourne home into a nurturing environment, helping you enjoy a harmonious lifestyle in one of Australia's most vibrant cities.

## 2. Silent Signs Your Home Is an Unhealthy Place to Live

Maybe you occasionally slack on cleaning or wait too long to dive in. Or maybe you don't know that what you're doing—or not doing—is hurting you.

### Home is where the health is...

We've all been there. Maybe you go a while between dustings. Let the dog sleep in the bed. Watch moisture bead up on the bathroom window. Sometimes these things are easy to ignore. Unfortunately, these innocent-seeming habits could be making you and your family sick.

While you likely know that your cleaning supplies could be secretly making you sick, you may not know how much damage not cleaning could be doing. It could be that you're cleaning enough, but not cleaning your cleaning supplies. It's tricky—but following these important tips can help keep you and your family safe and healthy.

### Your home has too much moisture

While moisture in the home is normal—bathing, cooking, and even breathing all contribute—excessive moisture is not, according to expertmoldtest.com. Mold loves humid environments, and if there is excessive moisture in the home, it's bound to grow, especially in corners and ceilings. The Melbourne Gov warns that mold can cause nasal stuffiness, throat irritation, coughing or wheezing, eye irritation, or, in some cases skin irritation.



### You're vacuuming without a HEPA filter

Research from MIT reveals that air pollution causes about 200,000 early deaths per year in Melbourne, and it worsens asthma and allergies. That's why you may want to invest in a HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filter vacuum to prevent tiny particles of dust from being blown back out into your indoor air.

### You're forgetting to change the vacuum filter

If you're using a HEPA filter, you'll want to make sure you're changing it every six months or when you notice signs of wear and tear. This will ensure an effective filter, while also preserving the life of the machine.

#### You're not cleaning vents and ducts

Vents might not be in your line of vision quite like dirty dishes, but that doesn't mean they don't need cleaning too. Vents harbor a ton of dust from the air, and when you turn on the heat or air conditioning, all those dust particles are redistributed throughout your house. You can take off the vent cover and clean out the grime you can reach, but you'll want to enlist a professional to thoroughly clean your ducts. The pros use compressed air and air agitators to clear out hard-to-reach dust.

#### Your bathroom has poor ventilation

Are you keeping the window open or using the fan when showering? You should! Excess moisture can not only cause your paint and wallpaper to detach, but it encourages mold, which can thrive and multiply indoors, damaging your house and potentially your health, according to the EPA.

### You're using the wrong household cleaners

As you spray cleaner around the house, it settles on all types of surfaces. Plus, you inhale it as you spritz. In a COVID-19 world, people are cleaning more frequently than ever. The right cleaners are crucial to not only protect against the virus but protect you from being exposed to the harsh chemicals. Further, common household chemicals—bath products, dish soap, bleach—can damage your airways and lungs.

### You're not dusting correctly

Vacuuming once a week and wiping down countertops means you're only making a dent in the dust around your house. It builds up every single day, and the more time you let go by without wiping it up, the more you're exposing yourself to harmful particles. Use a damp cloth to gather dust as opposed to using a duster (or a dry cloth), which, according to the Melbourne College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology, will only spread the dust around and trigger allergies. Also, be sure to dust from high to low.

### You're ignoring your gutters

Leaky gutters are another cause of moisture buildup, allowing excess water into your walls, basement, or crawl space. If your gutters aren't covered, you'll want to make sure you clean them out regularly.

### Your bedroom is musty

Although you vacuum and dust, you actually need to move your chest of drawers, desks, and other furniture to thoroughly clean. Pull your bed away from the wall, and you might be shocked to see just how much crud is collecting just behind your head. And remember to regularly wash your bedding—once every one to two weeks—and make sure you have a good mattress protector. Turn it every couple of months, and vacuum it when you do.

### You wear your shoes inside the house

You wouldn't roll around a public bathroom, but nearly everyone would walk around one and then walk around their house in the same shoes. Given that you roll on your carpets with your kids or the dog and put your feet up on the coffee table, you might want to leave the shoes at the door. Researchers from the University of Arizona found that shoes can track in 400,000-plus bacteria per shoe, including E. coli, a strain that's known to cause nasty gastrointestinal distress

# 3. Ways to Make Your Home a Healthier Place to Live

Make these changes to your home environment to help keep your immunity in tip-top shape.

If you're feeling sniffly during cold and flu season, it might be worth taking a look around your house. A healthy, clean environment is one way to help combat sickness, but there are other improvements you can make to make it less likely to fall victim to a virus. We asked home health experts to share easy steps you can take to safeguard your home from germs while boosting your immunity. Whether you sense illness coming on, or you just want to prevent it, these strategies will make your living space a whole lot healthier.



### **Improve Indoor Air Quality**

"Improving indoor air quality is one of the top ways to improve our health at home," says Michael Rubino, a mold and air quality expert, environmental wellness advocate, and founder of HomeCleanse. "The average person breathes 20,000 breaths daily and spends 90 percent of their time indoors. Ensuring these spaces have healthy air quality is an overlooked aspect of promoting our ongoing wellness." Fortunately, there are several ways you can improve your indoor air quality.

### **Clean Regularly**

One of the simplest ways to boost the air quality of your home is to clean. This removes toxins from building up in the form of dust and debris. Clean all surfaces in your home regularly, vacuuming and dusting. Use microfiber towels (which grab dust more effectively than other cloth types), eco-friendly cleaning products, and a HEPA vacuum cleaner to keep your space as clean as possible.

Another simple way to improve your home health is to take off your shoes upon entering, says Andy Pace, a Healthy Home Concierge and founder of The Green Design Center, a resource for homeowners and contractors looking to source products and designs that are healthy and green. Wearing shoes in the house can track all kinds of germs and undo a lot of the effort you put into cleaning your home. Have a designated mudroom or shoe area by your door to keep your shoes away from the rest of your living space.

### **Reduce Clutter**

Cutting down on clutter is a great way to prevent dust and germs from building up in your home. Dust is one of the worst culprits for releasing toxins into air, and reducing clutter in your home cuts down on dust buildup because you've reduced the surface area on which dust would normally land. A less cluttered home is also easier to clean. "The less 'stuff' on surfaces throughout the home, the healthier the space will be and, more importantly, the healthier our air quality will be," Rubino says.

### **Dust Often**

Regularly dusting your furniture and items in your home will help keep your air cleaner and reduce your risk of getting sick. "Dust frequently," Rubino says. "Contaminants like mold spores, mycotoxins, bacteria, pollen, pet dander, and more settle where dust settles. When this layer of particles gets disturbed, it will become airborne and can opportunistically enter our lungs through inhalation. The less dust there is, the healthier our air and we will be.

### **Use Air Purifiers**

Air purifiers can give your home and immune system an additional healthy boost. "Invest in air purifiers with the technology to eliminate contaminants from the air," Rubino says. "A whole-house air purifying system is a great option to help avoid space restraints from many smaller machines." Look for purifiers with HEPA filtration systems to remove as many unhealthy substances from the air as possible.

### **Regularly Change Air Filters**

Change your HVAC filters regularly. Dirty air filters won't be able to screen out airborne contaminants, allowing them to circulate back into your home. "Schedule bi-annual HVAC maintenance," Rubino says. "As the home's 'lungs,' it's important to ensure these machines operate correctly and are not contaminated with microbial growth."

### Keep Humidity Moderate

When it comes to humidity, there is a sweet spot that is not too moist and not too dry for optimal health. If you live in an arid area or have unstable humidity, consider getting a humidifier for your home. "One of the first and best steps to improving air quality in the home is to keep the home humidity below 50 percent to lessen the chances for mold development," Pace says.

### **Use the Right Cleaning Products**

Quality cleaning products can help you stay healthy while enjoying your indoor spaces. To keep your immunity up, clean with microfiber towels and eco-friendly cleaning products. Use anti-bacterial wipes and cleaners on areas that are touched and used often, such as door handles, faucets, fridge doors, and toilet handles.

Use a HEPA vacuum cleaner to help keep your air clean—it uses a High-Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filter to remove at least 99.97 percent of dust, dirt, and other particles as small as 0.3 microns from the air. This removes allergens, pet dander, pollen, and mold from your air.

### Make Your Bedroom a Sleep Sanctuary

Strengthen your immune system with a clean, peaceful retreat for rest. You can make your bedroom a sleep sanctuary by using blackout curtains and soothing scents like lavender to promote relaxation. Keep your bedroom dark and cool for optimal sleep.

"Bedroom flooring should be a hard surface like wood or cork so it is easy to keep clean and less likely to retain dust," Pace says. Make sure your mattress is comfortable and firm enough for a good night's sleep. Clean your bedding regularly, dust often, and use natural cleaning products. If you don't have a HVAC filtration system, place an air purifier in your bedroom to improve the air quality.

### Stock Your Fridge with Fresh Fruits and Veggies

Immune-boosting foods will help you stay healthy and weather cold and flu season. Cut back on highly processed foods and add more fresh fruits and veggies to your kitchen. Some excellent immunity-boosting foods include citrus fruits, green and leafy vegetables, red bell peppers, and broccoli. Fresh ginger and garlic are great to season meals and offer an additional immunity boost.

While you're at it, consider cutting back on alcohol (which studies have shown may weaken your immunity) so it might be worth clearing out the bar cart to reduce any temptations. And then swap in some immunity-boosting beverages instead.

### Set Up an Exercise Space

Whether you have a yoga mat you keep rolled up in a corner, or a whole room you can use for working out, a home exercise space is a great way to improve your health and boost your immunity. Regular exercise helps boost your immune system and also improves your mental state, helping you to relax and sleep better.

## 4. How to Improve the Indoor Air Quality of Your Home



You spend a lot of time in your house, so it's important to pay attention to the indoor air quality of your space. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), indoor air can be up to five times more polluted than outside, which can have serious side effects on your health. Mold, mildew, smoke, dust, and other invisible allergens might lurk around your home. Long-term exposure to these pollutants has been linked to asthma and other respiratory diseases, heart disease, and cancer.

Fortunately, a few simple steps can help improve your indoor air quality for a cleaner, healthier home. We talked to indoor air quality experts to learn how to do just that.

### How to Improve Your Home's Indoor Air Quality

Proper airflow, fresh air from outside, and ventilation are essential to indoor air quality, says Lauren Weigel, Thermastor vice president and general manager. The first step is recognizing the signs of unhealthy indoor air quality. "The most common indicators include lingering cooking smells, fogged mirrors and windows, damp rooms, clothes or towels, strong chemical odors from cleaning, and mold," Weigel says. Once you've identified an air quality issue, follow these steps to stop air pollutants at the source.

### 1. Keep Dust in Check

Regular dusting and vacuuming can help keep dust, pet dander, and other debris in check. Patrick Van Deventer, director of product engineering at Portacool, also recommends using dust mite-proof covers on mattresses, pillows, and box springs. He also recommends washing bedding in hot water at least once a week.

### 2. Use Your Vent Fan

Always turn on your bathroom ventilation fan while showering to prevent mold or mildew growth. If you're unsure if the fan is working, try holding a tissue near the fan. "If the fan is removing air properly, the paper will be drawn against the grill and remain there as long as the fan is on," she says.

### 3. Practice Healthy Cooking and Cleaning

Turn on your range's ventilation hood while cooking to control smoke, excess moisture, and other pollutants released into the air while preparing food. Weigel says you should also turn on your range hood or open a window when using household cleaners, which often contain harsh chemicals that can circulate into the air.

### How to Use Household Machines for Better Indoor Air Quality

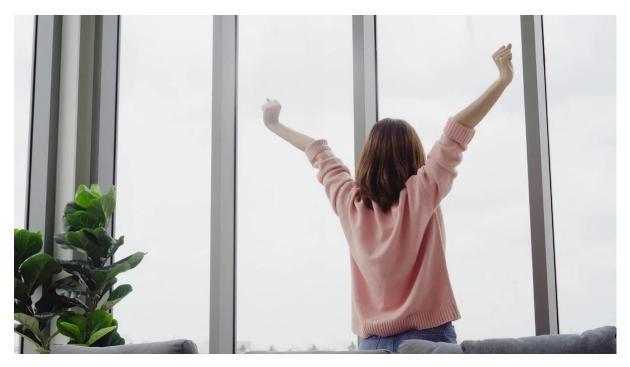
Specific machines can also help us breathe easier indoors, but having an air filter doesn't mean your indoor air quality will be perfect. Mold, dust, and other allergens can accumulate in your air conditioner, humidifier, and air filter and pollute the air you breathe. Here's what you need to know to keep these devices clean, efficient, and effective.

### **Air Conditioners**

What they do: As anyone who lives in a warm-weather climate knows, air-conditioning is a must-have for summertime comfort. Besides cooling the air inside your home, air conditioners also remove moisture so you feel less hot and sticky.

How to use them effectively: To cool down the entire house, central air-conditioning is usually the most effective way to go. Be aware, though, that when temperatures are mild, your air conditioner might not be running enough to actually remove moisture from the air, Van Deventer says. Additionally, a central air conditioner that's too powerful for the size of the house will cool the air down quickly but won't have a chance to adequately remove moisture. If you just want to cool a single room, a less expensive option is a window-mounted air conditioner.

Safety alert: Because water condenses on an air conditioner's cooling coils, they can be a potential source of mold.



#### **Air Filters**

What they do: Air filters remove irritants such as mold spores, pet dander, candle and cigarette soot, and even skin cells from the air, making indoor air quality better and easier to breathe, especially for people who have allergies. "Simply opening up a window allows for air exchange, but keep in mind it does nothing to filter out the air and other harmful allergens or asthma triggers that could intrude into your home," Van Deventer says. A filtered ventilator is the best way to bring fresh air in and expel polluted air outside.

How to use them effectively: High-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters generally cost more than ionic filters, but HEPA filters are more efficient at removing all of the airborne particles, says Jay Portnoy, M.D., chief of pediatric allergy & immunology, telemedicine at Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City, Missouri. He says the best way to filter air for the whole house is with a filter placed in the furnace. (In desert regions, the filter may be attached to the air conditioner as part of an electric heat pump.) Be sure to leave the system's fan running even if the heat is not on to allow the filter to do its job.

Safety alert: "Some air filters produce ozone," Portnoy says. "The ozone oxidizes the chemicals that produce smells and makes the air smell fresh, but doesn't remove them." Because ozone can be an irritant, he recommends steering clear of ozone-producing devices (most are labeled on the package).

### **Air Purifiers**

What they do: Similar to air filters, air purifiers work to sanitize the air by removing contaminants that may cause odors or make us sick. These stand-alone devices include a filter to capture dust and other allergens and a fan to push clean air back into the room. Some also use ultraviolet light to help trap and kill airborne pathogens such as bacteria and mold and improve indoor air quality.

How to use them effectively: Standard air purifiers work best in small, closed rooms and are generally not effective for improving air quality across an entire home. However, large-room air purifiers do exist and can help eliminate allergens in bigger spaces.

Safety alert: Before purchasing an air purifier, check the packaging to ensure it doesn't produce ozone, which can be harmful to your health.

### Humidifiers

What they do: Does walking on your carpet give you an electric shock? Those sparks are an indicator that the humidity level in your home is too low. A humidifier can counteract this by adding moisture to the air.

How to use them effectively: Most people rely on stand-alone humidifiers to add moisture in individual rooms, which is fine if you can't attach a unit to the furnace. However, according to Portnoy, the most effective way to humidify the whole house is usually with an evaporative model that can be placed in your central furnace. To give the humidifier enough time to improve indoor air quality, you may need to leave the fan running even when the heat is off.

Safety alert: Without regular cleaning, humidifiers can shoot bacteria and mold into the air. Be sure to follow the proper instructions for cleaning a humidifier and fill it with fresh water daily.

### 5. Ways To Manage Your Home Environment To Improve Well-Being And Productivity

On average, people spend 90% of their time indoors, with much of that time at home. This statistic will likely increase with the growing trends of working and schooling remotely, and employers becoming more comfortable with hybrid work models. Knowing this, it's no surprise that many of us are seeking ways to improve the quality of our home environment, realizing the impact it has on our well-being and productivity.

Creating the ideal home environment can be overwhelming. And because every home is unique, there's no such thing as the perfect recipe. Fortunately, smart home technology exists today that helps monitor and control various indoor environmental quality elements, while also managing energy usage and costs. Evaluating your home's lighting, comfort level, air quality and sound pollution is a good place to start.

### Lighting

Light affects our human physiology more than we think. It impacts our mood, alertness and even our body's internal clock, known as the circadian rhythm. Artificial light comes in different forms, including incandescent, fluorescent and light-emitting diode (LED). We're also exposed to other artificial light like smartphone screens and televisions displays throughout the day, which can disturb our general well-being.

Natural lighting is always best and should be mimicked in your home or office to improve sleep, boost focus and help reduce stress and anxiety. Lighting manufacturers are launching new products that can enhance spaces with little natural daylight and automate brightness and color to be consistent with regular daylight fluctuation. Motion sensors or smart lights can also be used to program your day and save energy, as well as create the right mood for different needs.

### **Thermal Comfort**

Thermal comfort also plays an important role in our well-being. If your space is too hot or cold, or too humid or dry, it can impede alertness and productivity, as well as impact how well you sleep at night. Excessive humidity can also trigger health reactions like asthma, wheezing or itchy, red skin.



Although there are many factors that affect thermal comfort, air temperature and humidity both play a significant role. Installing a good and reliable HVAC system can help improve your environment and keep allergens and asthma triggers at bay.

You can also seamlessly control room temperature and humidity levels using energy-efficient smart thermostats. There are several smartphone apps that can connect you to your home's controls, giving you the power to monitor and regulate your home's environment from almost anywhere.

### Air Quality

According to research from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), airborne pollutants can be in two to five times higher concentrations indoors than outdoors. Some sources of air pollution come from within our own homes — like pet dander and dust mites. Others can come from the outdoors. Regardless, it's critical to manage indoor air quality for better comfort and well-being.

To better understand the quality of the air in your home, new air quality monitoring technology can be used to detect, measure and track invisible elements like room temperature, humidity, carbon dioxide, certain volatile organic compounds (like odors or potentially harmful byproducts of furniture or cleaning supplies) and microscopic particulate matter from cooking, wildfires or vehicle traffic.

A better understanding of the causes of poor air quality helps inform you of the simple measures you can take to decrease air pollutants, like regular cleaning or changing the air filter in your furnace or central HVAC system. There are also portable air cleaners and purification systems on the market that help limit the spread of viruses and other airborne particles that can trigger allergies or asthma. To best protect your family and your investment, make sure the product claims are backed up by third-party research and consult the advice of indoor air experts.

### **Sound Pollution**

The EPA also notes that "noise pollution adversely affects the lives of millions of people" and has a direct link to health. Disruptive noise in your home can lead to stress, high blood pressure, sleep disruption and lost productivity. Sound design matters, and taking steps to reduce or block out noise can help.

First, look for the causes of indoor disruptive noise, like a humming mechanical system or buzzing lights, and then talk to specialists who can offer tips. Check your window insulation and consider soundproofing your home if you can easily hear noise from the outside. There are also noise diffusers and absorbers ranging from basic to high-tech that you can install in your home.

The desire for healthy living has accelerated with the Covid-19 outbreak. Consider spending more time outdoors with a daily walk or bike ride. And, just as important, take control of your home space and better manage the elements like those I've listed to help improve your mood, well-being and productivity. There are more tools and technology than ever before to help ensure every home can provide a sustainable, efficient and quality indoor environment.

# 6. What Cleaning Products Contain Ammonia?

Ammonia is well-known for its pungent smell and cleaning potential. The natural gas is colourless and highly corrosive, which makes it a not-so-perfect cleaning solution. Still, the chemical is used in commercial cleaning products because it helps to break through the grease and filth effectively. However, it is not recommended by end of lease cleaning companies in Melbourne because of its adverse impact on health.

Ammonia, when inhaled in high amounts, can lead to burning of the nose, throat and respiratory system. If inhaled in lower amounts, it can irritate the nose and throat and cause coughing. Thus, to maintain the health and hygiene of your home, it is better to avoid cleaning products that contain ammonia. Here is everything you need to know about this chemical that can be a health hazard.

### 1. What Is Ammonia and Why is it Used

Ammonia is manufactured from methane and air. It is considered a hazardous substance because it is highly flammable. It is used in fertilisers, industrial refrigerants, fermentation, winemaking, and cleaning products.

It is naturally found in rainwater and soil. It evaporates quickly and can be mixed with water easily. However, it is not preferred by reputed companies offering professional end of lease cleaning Melbourne because of its corrosive nature and impact on humans and the environment.

### 2. Products Containing Ammonia

A wide range of commercial cleaning products contains ammonia, such as window and glass cleaners, furniture polish, all-purpose cleaners, stainless-less steel cleaners, floor polishing waxes, toilet cleaners, and oven cleaners.

Ammonia solution can be bought from stores, which is stronger than the household cleaners available in supermarkets. This high-potency chemical is classified as a dangerous good and must be used as directed in the safety instructions on the label.



### 3. Negative Impact of Ammonia

Individuals who come in contact with ammonia can suffer from irritation of the eyes, throat, nose and the entire respiratory system. It can commonly occur when cleaning the house with an ammonia-containing cleaner. Inhaling the fumes or their contact with the skin and eyes can cause irritation. If it is ingested by mistake, the chemical can burn the inside walls of the mouth and throat. In addition, ammonia is harmful to the environment. Thus, professional cleaners never use it to maintain the indoor air quality.

When cleaning solutions containing the chemical are washed away into the drains, they enter the rivers and impact marine life. Ammonia mixed in the air can cause land and air pollution. People with allergies and asthma must stay away from ammonia-based products. Keeping these products away from children and pets in the house is advisable to avoid any dangerous situation.

### 4. Check the Cleaning Products for Ammonia

As an environmentally and health conscious individual, you must avoid using ammonia for house cleaning. If you are gearing up for end of lease cleaning in Melbourne, ensure that you check the labels while buying commercial products. Toxic chemicals can hurt the ecosystem and they should not be mixed with other chemicals for dilution.

For example, mixing bleach and ammonia leads to the creation of chloramine, which can cause chest pain and breathlessness. Therefore, check the label even if you are buying the product online. Look for eco-friendly cleaners made from natural ingredients that do not cause harm to the environment or humans. These green cleaners are equally helpful in eliminating grunge and grease from surfaces.

### 5. How to Use Ammonia Safely

If you have already bought ammonia-based cleaning products, you must know how to use them safely to prevent untoward situations. The thumb rule is to follow the instructions given on the product label. Understand the guidelines in case of contact with skin or eyes and keep them in mind while using the cleaning product to stay safe.

It is best to wear a mask, gloves, full-sleeved clothing, and glasses to avoid inhalation and contact with skin and eyes. Keep the doors and windows open while cleaning to ensure the house is well-ventilated. Do not use the products near flames and heated surfaces. Keep a contingency plan ready if you accidentally spill or touch the chemical.

### 6. Homemade Cleaners that Replace Ammonia

Various household items can be used for cleaning different surfaces during end of lease cleaning Melbourne. These are excellent cleaners that cause no harm to the environment or person performing the tasks. Professional cleaners use these items to make organic solutions for sanitising all surfaces and leaving them streak-free.

These include lemon juice for removing grease from ovens and mould in the bathrooms, baking soda for cleaning carpets and toilet bowls, liquid dishwashing soap for degreasing countertops, and vinegar for cleaning glassware and faucets. Thus, prepare your DIY cleaning solutions and get ready to give your home a quick makeover

Cleaning the house does not mean layering it with toxic chemicals that pollute the environment. It is vital to leave the rented property in a hygienic living condition for the new tenant. Thus, you must avoid using ammonia-based products and switch to green cleaning at the end of the tenancy.

### 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, creating a healthy home environment in Melbourne is essential for fostering a balanced and fulfilling lifestyle. With the city's dynamic pace, a well-organized, clean, and serene living space can significantly enhance both physical and mental well-being. By embracing natural light, improving air quality, and incorporating sustainable practices, you can turn your home into a sanctuary that supports your overall health. A nurturing environment not only benefits your daily life but also reflects Melbourne's commitment to a sustainable and vibrant community. Start making these positive changes today to enjoy a healthier, happier home life in this lively city.

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