

## Chapter 1

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# Recognising the Value of Cleaning Well

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Benefiting from cleanliness
  - ▶ Deciding your cleaning priorities
  - ▶ Keeping on top of cleaning
  - ▶ Taking spills and scratches in your stride
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**I**magine arriving at a sumptuous hotel. The facilities are impressive, the food staggering, and the bedroom the ultimate in plush. But then . . . you notice stains on the red velvet carpet, your wine glass has old lipstick on the rim, and there's grime on the gold taps. Would you recommend the place? Absolutely not! You don't want to stay a moment longer than you have to in a place that isn't clean.

By contrast, take the feel of freshly laundered sheets, the ease of putting together a meal from a hygienic, uncluttered kitchen, or the anticipation of ending a tough day with a long, hot bath in relaxing surroundings.

For quality of everyday life – those fresh sheets – you need to keep your home, furnishings, and possessions clean. Few experiences depress more than waking up to dirt. For health reasons, basic levels of cleanliness are a must. Germs – bacteria, viruses, mould – reproduce rapidly if they're not destroyed by timely cleaning.

Finally, a clean home becomes a welcoming haven. Sure, it takes effort and discipline to maintain. And new items you buy for your home may bring with them fresh cleaning challenges.

Accidents mean that you always need to treat stains, too. But like getting the bathroom how you like it, getting your home right gets easier and easier. Your home won't ever run itself, but it may feel like a close thing.

## *Reaping the Surprising Benefits of a Clean Home*

Clean regularly and effectively and your place won't only look great, you also enjoy these additional benefits:

- ✔ **Fewer home accidents:** In the UK, almost three million home-accident injuries need hospital attention every year. Falls, the number one home accident, frequently happen as people trip over clutter or spills that weren't immediately cleared up.
- ✔ **Fresher air:** You eliminate unpleasant odours and promote easier breathing for anyone who has allergies or asthma.
- ✔ **A greater profit when you go to sell your home:** It's a fact that clean homes sell faster and for more money than dirty ones.
- ✔ **Lower furnishing bills:** With proper care, carpets, upholstery, and curtains may last up to twice as long as those that aren't tended to.
- ✔ **Lower restaurant bills:** If the kitchen's under control, you're more likely to enjoy cooking and eating at home.
- ✔ **More spontaneity:** Whether it's inviting friends back to your place or getting romantic exactly when the mood strikes, you can go with the moment if you're confident of a clean, welcoming environment.

And don't forget to experience a daily dollop of smugness! Sure, anyone *can* keep a clean home, but you actually *do* it. You can consider yourself one step ahead of all those others who are too lazy, disorganised, or time-pressed to make the effort.

In a nutshell, the three benefits that sum up the importance of keeping a clean home are

- ✓ A pleasant living environment
- ✓ A hygienic and germ-free living space
- ✓ The feel-good factor

## Setting Your Cleaning Priorities

Cleaning, insomuch as it includes neatness and a way of presenting your home, is also a highly personal subject. What is general tidying-up in one home appears to be overkill to another family that prefers to keep its trinkets out on show. Decide on your priorities and clean to suit these. There is no right or wrong, excepting that clear work surfaces are quicker to clean.

Get to know, too, which items and surfaces in your home you absolutely must keep spotless. Myself, I like the sugar bowl lid to be speck-free and I remove lint from the tumble dryer after every session. But I haven't got a thing about cleaning the sink overflow like my sister, or using a cotton bud (cotton swab) to spot clean the tripmaster (trip odometer) button on the car, like a former housemate.

**The point is:** If it's important to you, then it deserves your time and attention. If it isn't important to you, then ease up a little. Life is too short and too much fun to wash and drip-dry a pleated lampshade when vacuuming the dust away is enough.

## Finding the Time to Clean

A dirty kitchen is daunting. An entire house desperate for a clean is enough to make most of us reach not for the broom but for the front door! Little and often has to be the maxim of a good cleaning regimen. However busy your day, you can always find ten minutes somewhere without resorting to the depressing set-the-alarm-earlier suggestion.



Top of my time-finders are having a cereal bar as breakfast, recording TV programmes I think I want to watch (it's amazing how many I don't bother to watch after all), and arranging meet-ups with friends using e-mails rather than chatty phone calls.

## Absolutely Not Just Women's Work!

It took computers to make using a typewriter keyboard a unisex skill. Cleaning in the home continues to be done largely by women, even when both partners work or have retired. Physically, mentally, emotionally, practically and, increasingly, financially there are no good reasons for this.

Focusing on the areas of cleaning that each of you enjoys or does best saves time, gets better results, and dramatically cuts domestic rows. You may want to consider a one month

you, one month approach to say, ironing and bed-making. Or you might make time the crucial factor: every other Sunday, do a two-hour blitz together. But the smartest way to improve your relationship is take on board the household jobs that you know your partner really hates. The foundation for lifelong marriage isn't putting the bins out (and cleaning the inside with dilute chlorine bleach). But it sure helps.

The point is that cleaning won't shout out at you in the same way an empty stomach lets you know it's time to cook. There are exceptions – having no shirts for work propels most of us towards that pile of dirty laundry. But mostly things have to be bad indeed for smells, stains, or a state of chaos to stop you in your tracks. For the most part, you may have to use self-discipline to keep on task.

But there are bonuses. Unlike other chores – mowing the lawn, for instance – cleaning breaks effortlessly into small time-chunks. Putting the lawnmower away after only two strips is annoying and leaves the grass looking unsightly. However, in just five minutes spent cleaning, you can blitz the bathroom and celebrate a job well done.

So is ten minutes a day enough? The answer is yes, if . . .

- ✔ You do a single longer session once a week.
- ✔ You're maintaining a clean home rather than bringing a dirty one up to standard.
- ✔ You make light demands on your home, perhaps using it mostly at weekends and evenings.

The sad news is that if you have children, pets, or work from home, ten minutes is not enough. You need to find five or

ten more minutes each day for cleaning. But there's good news even here because if you have a family, it means that there are more people about to share the load.

## *Finding ways to cut your workload*



The furniture, floor surfaces, and how you store your personal possessions have a huge impact on how frequently you need to clean. Choose wisely and you can significantly cut your work.

- ✔ Go for easy-care washable furnishings and floors.
- ✔ Avoid dust-traps by choosing furniture without grooves, and cupboards and glass display units over open shelving.
- ✔ Take good care of your things. It's only after it gets scratched that a wood table or linoleum floor becomes a dirt magnet.
- ✔ Whenever you buy something new, ask the shop assistant how to keep it clean and how to treat stains. If the assistant merely smiles and shrugs, walk away.

Let me give an example of how just one buying choice can save you a working day a year. A painted louvred door can take 20 minutes to clean thoroughly because you need to run a gloved finger along each slat. If the door's in a high dust area, such as a kitchen, you need to clean it every two weeks. In contrast, a plain door takes a minute to wipe clean. With no crevices for dust, you can simply wash down every other month. Multiplying out the time, the cruel fact is that just one louvred door takes an amazing 8 hours and 34 minutes a year longer to keep clean. Multiply this throughout your home to understand how radically the things you buy affect your cleaning.



You can also cut your workload if you:

- ✔ Get others involved in the cleaning. Even children can be motivated to help out, possibly with the promise of pocket money. Even a three-year-old can clear a floor of toys to get it ready for sweeping.
- ✔ Pay for help. Either have someone come regularly or get a cleaner in for a catch-up cleaning session.

- ✔ Avoid situations that create mess. Parties, pets, and visiting children are obvious ones. (See Chapter 16 for tips on dealing with kids and pets and Chapter 17 for advice on hosting.)
- ✔ Make more use of the garden. Eat and entertain outside in summertime.
- ✔ Choose cleaning products that you don't need to rinse. You can cut the time you spend on cleaning sinks, walls, and floors in half!
- ✔ Buy the best-quality cleaning materials and equipment. A good-quality dustpan and brush means you get all the dust in with one or two strokes instead of chasing dirt around the floor trying to get it up.
- ✔ Clean when you feel refreshed and energetic. If you're tired before you start out, you're bound to be slower and less effective.
- ✔ Throw away unnecessary clutter and store possessions in drawers or closed containers.

## *Offering shortcuts for busy people*

It's not just time, it's remembering that you should be doing something domestic that can be the problem. So try these memory joggers.

- ✔ Buy sufficient bed linen so that you can change sheets on a set day each week, even if you don't have time to wash them until later.
- ✔ Get your cleaning supplies from a supermarket that offers online groceries. After you place your first order, the items appear as 'favourites' next time, so you can simply log on to top up stocks.
- ✔ Keep a timer by the washing-machine. Set it for the length of the wash programme and take it with you as you go about doing other chores. When the timer rings you know you've washing to unload.
- ✔ Use a fabric pen to mark initials on the inside of children's clothing. This saves time on sorting washed clothes.
- ✔ Get out all the cleaning products and equipment that you need at the start (assuming no children or pets are about).

You save on trips up and down stairs, and it's hard to forget to do the windows today if the squeegee's right in front of you!

- ✓ Start a cleaning file, either on cards or on the computer. Include special-care instructions and manufacturer help-line phone numbers and Web sites.
- ✓ Cheat a little and stretch all the filter-change dates for vacuum cleaners, water softeners, and so on to the same date. This way, you're far more likely to remember to take the necessary action.

## *Treating Stains and Repairing Damage*

Ongoing cleaning is good, but it's only by being on the ball when accidents happen that you get to live in a home that isn't marred by stains and marks. It doesn't matter how debris-free a just-vacuumed carpet is. You won't notice how attractively your vacuum swept the pile if all you can see is a blue spot where a pen got crushed underfoot and leaked ink all over the beige carpet.

The possibility of stains gets a lot of people uptight, which is a real shame. Where's the fun in life if you're too wary of spills to offer guests beetroot (beets) or chocolate fondue, or you limit your small child to just two friends on his birthday, because having a whole young crowd over is sure to be the death of the carpet.

The thing to bear in mind about spills is that most of them do not become stains. And many of those that do don't have to stay stains forever. Take that ink, for example. With the right solvent, it's history.

In the chapters on stain removal I show how getting to a problem quickly and then behaving gently and with extreme persistence pays off. Likewise, whilst a scratch on a new piece of furniture is never cause for pleasure, it absolutely doesn't warrant trimming the cat's claws. In the chapter on scratches, rips, and scuffs I show how the same techniques of gentle persistence win through.

