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## 5 ways your home decor can keep you healthy

Here are simple alternatives for five common interior products that can help you stay healthy and have a beautiful home.

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JUST BREATHE: Alleviate allergies by making green choices for home decor. (Photo: tommerton2010/Flickr)

Recently, I wrote a post about [five things in your home that can contribute to poor indoor air quality](#), aggravate allergy and asthma symptoms, and that could lead to more serious future illnesses. Here, I'll tell you five ways to alleviate the bad air and create a more healthy environment for you and your family.

### Furniture

The biggest indoor pollution contributors in furniture are the glues, adhesives and finishes applied to the frames, legs and other wood pieces that make up a sofa or chair. Look for furniture that's made with low-VOC materials like shellac, beeswax or milk paint, and water-based glues.

Also, buy furniture made of solid hardwood and avoid anything with particleboard or MDF. Not only will you escape the off-gassing from these products, but you'll save money in the long run as solid hardwood products last longer and don't need to be replaced as often. Consider finding unfinished hardwood pieces that you can finish yourself using water-based, low-VOC finishes.

For upholstery, look for cushions that contain wool filling. Wool is naturally flame resistant and not coated in fire retardant chemicals. Also consider using soy or other plant-based cushioning or natural latex foam.

[Lee Furniture](#) is an excellent manufacturer of stylish, attractive upholstery that is committed to green and healthy materials in every product it makes.

### Fabrics

Stay away from the petrochemicals! Use natural fibers like cotton, linen, wool, silk or even bamboo or hemp-based fabrics. And make sure whatever fabric you choose has not been treated. If a label says "wrinkle resistant," "permanent press," "water repellent" or "stain repellent" it has more than likely been dipped in chemicals to give it that characteristic. But, be aware that a lot of natural fibers have been grown using pesticides. If at all possible, buy fabrics labelled "organic" — they have more than likely been grown free of pesticides.

Another alternative is to seek out polyester fabrics that have been created from recycled materials — either previously used polyester fabric or some other plastic, like post-consumer plastic water bottles. Some companies create these durable, naturally wrinkle-resistant fabrics without special treatments or extra chemicals so they don't off-gas when they end up on your sofa. [Valley Forge](#) fabrics is one company producing such fabrics (and they look good, too).

### Paint and wallcoverings

There have been amazing advances in paint in the last few years. Nearly all the major paint retailers, like Sherwin-Williams and Benjamin Moore, offer zero-VOC coatings that cover perfectly, are durable and washable, and don't smell at all when applied. And they come in every color! I've used both Sherwin-Williams' Harmony and Benjamin Moore's Natura brands, and there is virtually no difference in performance from their other brands. And I no longer experience flare-ups of my severe asthma when I paint with these products.

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Another alternative is milk paint, which is even better for people with chemical sensitivities. It's made of milk, clay, botanical ingredients, natural oils (like linseed), beeswax and mineral pigments. It gives a charming rustic finish, but comes in a limited color selection.

If wallpaper is more your style, look for products printed with water-based ink made from rice-paper, linen, silk or paper-backed grasses like jute or bamboo. Get paper without adhesives so you or your installer can use water-based, low-VOC glue. And avoid chemical additives for stain repellants, biocides or fireproofing. [Mod Green Pod](#) makes fun and funky papers that meet all of these concerns and can be sponge-cleaned, too.

### Carpet

Ideally, if you have severe allergies and/or asthma, you should avoid wall-to-wall carpet altogether and go with a hard surface flooring/area rug combination. But the appeal and look of soft carpeting covering an entire room is hard to resist, so if wall-to-wall is your thing, consider going with all-natural wool. It's naturally flame-retardant and is a natural fiber. Wool does attract moths, and as a result some wool carpet is treated with chemicals to make them moth-resistant. Avoid these carpets.

If wool is out of your price range (it can be expensive), search out carpeting with the Carpet and Rug Institute's Green Label Plus certification. This certification ensures carpeting does not exceed certain chemical emission levels. [Mohawk](#) produces its SmartStrand brand carpeting with this certification.




Finally, look for carpet backed with jute or natural latex and be sure to choose a natural fiber padding and to use low-VOC adhesives.

### Cabinetry

Like furniture, the most important consideration for choosing healthy cabinetry is to avoid particleboard or MDF and go with solid hardwood. Although particleboard saves money up front, it's not nearly as durable as hardwood and you (or the next owner of your home) will just end up having to rip out and replace that cheap cabinetry in 10 or 15 years, which is hardly cost-effective (or green — most of what's ripped out usually ends up in landfills).

Also, be careful of the finishes you apply to your new cabinetry. Look for low-VOCs, of course, and think about an oil finish, which is beautiful, durable and natural.

Products that keep you and your family healthier are becoming more available and more inexpensive. It's not hard to find better alternatives, especially if you know what to look for. Hopefully, the above can get you started toward a home free of chemicals, nastiness, and bad air.

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