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## LIVING WELL: What's lurking in your bathroom?

Just when you thought it was safe to go back into... your bathroom.

In spite of your best efforts, your bathroom may be causing those headaches, coughs, itchy eyes and sore throats that you've been blaming on pollen and seasonal allergies. Not that they don't contribute to congestion and respiratory disruption, but your bathroom may be the biggest offender.

Take a look around – are there cracked tiles, broken or missing caulking around the tub? Mold and bacteria build up in those crevices and cracks and push their way into the walls that surround you. Not only do they cause wall damage but they adversely affect your health as well. A simple fix is to re-caulk or replace tiles where necessary. Fill those areas that otherwise can have water building up, spores multiplying, and yes, the dreaded mold growing.

Mildew is the precursor to mold and if you don't have good ventilation in your bathroom, you're going to accumulate lots of mildew.

Run your bathroom fan for 20 minutes after a shower to ensure all the moisture has been removed. The key to a good bathroom fan is to make sure it vents directly outdoors and not into your attic, otherwise the attic will obtain the moisture and hence, grow mold.

Wipe down walls and other surfaces that "pool" moisture.

Left alone, mildew converts into mold and we all know where that leads.

Cleaning is a must, but be careful about what cleaners you use. Many people react to harsher cleaners that contain ammonia or chlorine (and remember, never mix those two!). So it may be wise to use non-toxic cleaners to wipe out the germs and bacteria.

Be sure to sanitize areas that accumulate germs and viruses easily and quickly, like faucets and door handles. A 3 percent hydrogen peroxide solution or sanitizing wipes are good to use regularly in the bathroom on these fixtures.

Consider nylon or washable shower curtains instead of vinyl ones, which can contain certain irritants.

Filtered showerheads can be helpful for people with sensitivity to chlorine, which is in the tap water.

While not wanting to sound any alarms, we often overlook places that may be causing health issues.

Consider the age of plumbing fixtures and pipes as well as paint. The solder on old plumbing fixtures put in before 1978 may contain lead. Next time you have the plumber in, you may want to discuss that.

Back to the mold – consider other places that hold moisture such as the laundry room, the basement, crawl spaces, and closets. Consider ventilation in such areas or products that help absorb moisture, particularly during the hot and humid season. Leaky air conditioners are a magnet for mold. Ensure that all the ducts are secure from leaks. Wallpaper and carpet backing are other places where moisture can gather and turn to mildew and mold. Wash down wallpaper and dry completely. Vacuum under rugs as well. And common areas where dust gathers and can convert into a moldy situation if left unaddressed should be dusted and vacuumed often.

You may notice a difference in your health; and your head and respiratory system will thank you!

*Living Well is a monthly column provided by Joan F. Wright on behalf of the NVNA & Hospice. Wright is a Certified Dementia Practitioner with NVNA and Hospice, a non-profit home healthcare and hospice agency serving over 25 communities on the South Shore from Milton to Plymouth. For information call 781-659-2342 or visit [www.nvna.org](http://www.nvna.org).*

