

THE BUSY MOM'S GUIDE TO CLEANING

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THE **GROSS** STUFF



THE **STICKY** STUFF

Your days of Swiffering up Cheerios dust and teasing smushed raisins out of a flokati rug may be in the past, but as it turns out, the saying “bigger kids, bigger problems” holds true when it comes to housecleaning too. Near-toxic tube socks, Vesuvian microwave mishaps, Technicolor misadventures in hair dye—half the time, you’re just trying to contain the dumpster fire that is teenagedom, let alone take care of more mundane things around the house (hello mildew, my old friend). And speaking of half the time, between holding down your own job and driving the Mom Shuttle, when exactly are you supposed to work a sponge? The moment has come to up your cleaning game—by which we mean clean smarter, not harder. These pro tips will help you crush your cleaning tasks—no matter how gross, sticky, stinky or tedious (and, yes, we divvied them up that way)—right up until your kids are old enough to fend for themselves. Because that does happen eventually, right?

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The latest overturned beverage seeping into the floor cracks is your teen's post-volleyball green smoothie.

This is *so* not what you pictured as you chose the weathered-oak finish of your wood-floor dreams. Don't let the guilty party reach for a wad of paper towels (unless you want to find out which insects are attracted to pulverized chia seeds). Suck the smoothie up using a wet/dry vac, or if you have a squeegee, use it to scrape the thick liquid into a dustpan, says cleaning expert Melissa Maker, founder of Clean My Space. Then wet a microfiber cloth (or microfiber mop pad) with plain water, wipe the area and repeat. "If there are ridges in the floor, the microfiber will pull the spill from the cracks into the cloth," says Merry Maids cleaning expert Debra Johnson. If your floor gaps are wide or deep, you may need to get in there with a damp toothbrush too (sorry).

Products: Ettore Original Squeegee, amazon.com, \$7. Rubbermaid Plastic Wide Mouth Dustpan, acehardware.com, \$4.50. Shop-Vac 5-Gallon Stainless Steel Wet-Dry Vacuum, amazon.com, \$52. Rejuvenate Click n Clean Multi Surface Spray Mop System, homedepot.com, \$30.



The shower drain is slow, and you suspect a squirrel-sized hairball is to blame.

It's time to whip out a declogging wand or pipe snake. Scary as these tools may sound, they require zero plumbing know-how. "You simply wind one down the drain and pull it out for a scary surprise," Maker says. To prevent future hairy situations, get a shower drain hair stopper (and task your resident teen/

Kardashian-alike with swiping out the strands after her showers). You can also regularly pour ¼ cup baking soda into the drain followed by ¼ cup vinegar, let sit for at least three minutes, then rinse with boiling water. "Making this a monthly ritual will typically keep drains and pipes clear," Johnson says. (If you use a handheld steamer on your clothes, get in the habit of pouring the leftover water down the drain.)

Products: FlexiSnake Drain Weasel Hair Clog Tool, homedepot.com, \$5. Danco Bathtub Hair Catcher, Strainer and Snare, amazon.com, \$4.



likes an iron-handled style for its easy grip. From now on, keep a layer of folded paper towels or newspaper at the bottom of your trash can to catch leaks and misses; swap in a fresh layer weekly and sprinkle in a little baking soda.

Products: Method All-Purpose Cleaning Wipes, lowes.com, \$8. Better Life Stain and Odor Eliminator, amazon.com, \$6. Rubbermaid Professional Plus Scrub Brush, amazon.com, \$3.



Dank sludge in the bathroom tiles is pretty much killing the spa vibe you were after.

It's hard to fully enjoy your hot shower (aka temporary escape from the family) while a colony of grout mildew silently screams for your attention. You can eradicate it without major elbow grease or toxic fumes. Start by scrubbing with a toothbrush and a paste of baking soda and peroxide. "This will kill the mildew, but it won't get rid of the discoloration," explains Christine Dimmick, author of *Detox Your Home* and CEO/founder of The Good Home Co.

For stains, follow up with a bleach pen—it's powerful sans the smell and mess of the liquid stuff. Another easy fix is a mold-control spray called Concrobium. "It's a scent-free product that works very well," Maker says. Use it as often as needed to keep mildew in check. If your shower head itself is looking gunky, you might have the additional problem of mineral buildup. Dunk the head for a couple of minutes in a bucket of water and CLR Calcium, Lime & Rust Remover.

Products: Clorox Bleach Pen, target.com, \$3. Concrobium Mold Control, homedepot.com, \$10. CLR Calcium, Lime & Rust Remover, homedepot.com, \$6.



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Scary mystery sludge lurks at the bottom of your kitchen trash can.

You've already lugged out the trash for the 567th time this week—there's no way you're dragging the can outdoors for a proper hose-down. For now, just get in there with paper towels followed by disposable cleaning wipes to clear out the spillage and follow with a blast of germ/odor-busting spray cleaner. Or if you want, take it in the shower for a rinse. To dislodge caked-on gunk, apply a paste of equal parts water and borax, which will de-stink as it dissolves grime, Maker says. (Wear gloves; the stuff can irritate skin.) Allow the paste to soak in for 10 minutes, then scrub with a bristle brush. Maker

THE SIX STAGES OF CLEANING THE SHOWER DRAIN

DENIAL "What clogged drain?"



SHOCK "IS THAT A HAIRBALL OR AN ANIMAL???"



BLAME "That is NOT my hair."



DEPRESSION "How is this my life?"



ACCEPTANCE "OK, I'm going in."



TRIUMPH "I am unstoppable!"



Lasagna night was fun. The resulting crusty pan is the opposite.

Don't let all those people sighing over the sink in TV commercials mess with your mind—cookware challenges really aren't that complicated. "I rub pots and pans with half a lemon. It does an amazing job of cutting through grease and softening cooked-on gunk," says Donna Smallin Kuper, certified home cleaning technician and author of *Cleaning Plain & Simple*. You can also half-fill the pot/pan with water and a drop of dishwashing soap and bring to a simmer on the stove. Then just use a spatula to dislodge the debris, or pour out the water and use a pot scraper—a handy thingamajig made for moments like these.

Products: Bambu Organic Bamboo Pot Scrapers, bambuhome.com, \$10 for 4.



You can no longer ignore the grease layer on kitchen walls and cabinets (or unsee the dog hairs clinging to them).

Degreasing the whole kitchen is one of those jobs that makes even your most dreaded tasks (help Lucy with pre-calc homework!) seem fun by comparison. But it's less daunting when you're armed with a cleanser that's up to the task, like Krud Kutter. Apply the degreaser and let it sit for five minutes (first testing on a small section of cabinet, either inside a door or down by the kick, to be sure it won't damage the finish). Then wipe with a sponge followed by a damp cloth to remove all traces of residue, and finish with a plush microfiber cloth to dry and polish.

Products: Krud Kutter Concentrated Cleaner/Degreaser, walmart.com, \$6. Maker's Clean Ultra Plush Cloth 2-Pack, makersclean.com, \$19.



Were your glass fridge shelves clear at one point? It's impossible to tell.

From the looks of it, everything in the fridge has been secretly leaking all the time. Resist the temptation to hose it all down with all-purpose cleaner and inadvertently spritz your baby spinach in the process. Mix a solution of one part vinegar, one part Dr. Bronner's Unscented Pure-Castile Liquid Soap and three parts water, says Dimmick, or buy a premade

shopping day two minutes more annoying), swab shelves with nontoxic wipes before you slide the new goods in.

Products: The Good Home Co. All Purpose Cleanser, goodhomestore.com, \$20. Aunt Fannie's Cleaning Vinegar Wipes, amazon.com, \$8. Dr. Bronner's Unscented Pure-Castile Liquid Soap, shopdrbronner.com, \$11.



Your teen nuked a pizza burger and the microwave looks like a crime scene.

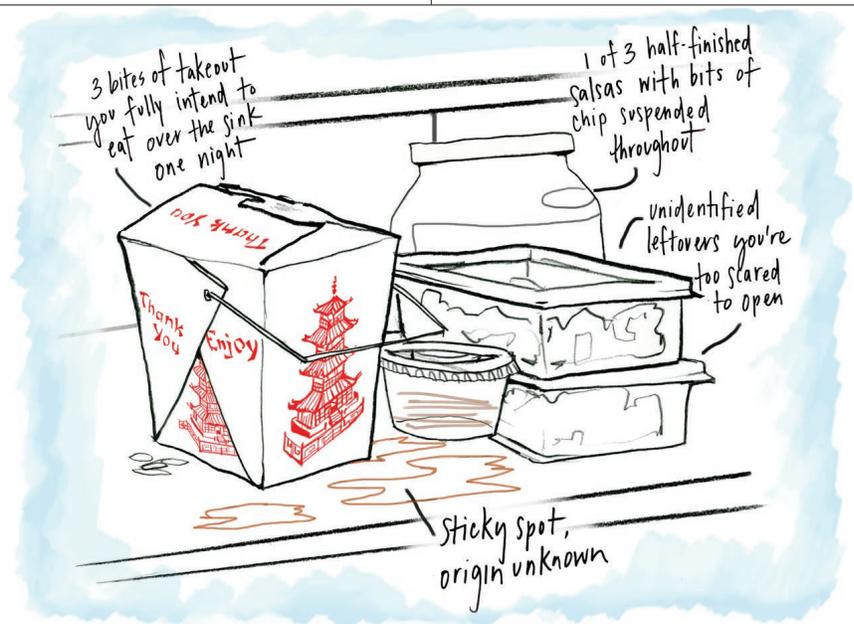
Instead of reaching for your kitchen sponge (pros say sponges tend to leave little particles behind), steam the mess right off. Squeeze half a lemon into a bowl of water, then microwave for three to five minutes—long enough for water vapor to soften spattered gunk. Food should slide off when you wipe with a cotton or microfiber cloth. Finish with grease-cutting spray if you're feeling ambitious.

Products: Formula 409 Multi-Surface Cleaner, target.com, \$3.



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version, like her Good Home Co. All Purpose Cleanser. Clear out the fridge section by section, tossing crusty containers as you go. And whenever you do a big grocery trip (because, promise, this will only make



When you open the fridge, it smells like someone ordered Thai food...last month.

Whether we're talking forgotten take-out or old chopped onion, some fridge odors can be as stubborn as they are appetite-killing. Beyond cleaning out your fridge, that clichéd-but-true tip about keeping an open box of baking soda is still your best bet (as long as you swap in a fresh one at least every three months).

Products: Arm & Hammer Baking Soda Fridge-N-Freezer Flo-Thru, walmart.com, \$7 for 4.



That basement rug has gone from slightly musty to downright funky.

The stench may mean mold or mildew is slowly proliferating, thanks to excess moisture. Check to make sure nothing's leaking down there (if not, you may just need to get a dehumidifier in action).

formulated to neutralize mycotoxins, the musty-scented compounds released by mold and mildew, says Nelson. Spray up into the air and let the mist settle onto the rug. (Don't spray directly—you want just a fine mist.) Steam cleaning is worth the effort too. "For musty odors, blasting with steam can really help," Maker says. Just be sure to ventilate with open windows and fans (save this project for a non-muggy day!) until the rug is fully dry.

Products: Bissell SpotClean Professional Portable Carpet Cleaner, bissell.com, \$129. Medina Biological Odor Control, amazon.com, \$19.



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Confirmed: That dark spot on the carpet is, indeed, cat pee.

You know from experience what comes next: a room with the forever scent of ammonia-meets-barnyard that quickly turns into a backup litter box for your repeat offender. Unless you address this mess the right way, and fast: Blot the accident zone repeatedly with a paper towel to draw out as much moisture as you can, then saturate the entire urine-affected area with an enzyme-based cleaner (follow the label instructions). Repeat if needed until stench and stain are gone. If you're dealing with an area rug, be sure to check/clean the pad underneath too. Rinse and let dry thoroughly, sprinkle on some baking soda, let sit overnight to soak up any lingering odor, then run the vacuum (which might trigger Socksy's anxiety but, hey, now you're even).

Products: Urine Off Multi-Purpose Stain and Odor Remover, amazon.com, \$27 for 2. Nature's Miracle Urine Destroyer for Cats, amazon.com, \$13.



Somebody's bedroom smells like teen spirit. A lot of it.

For now, air things out—lug throw rugs and hang them over a porch rail in the sun for a day or two. (If you have wall-to-wall carpet, open the windows.) Then sprinkle your floor covering with baking soda, let it sit overnight to absorb moisture and stench, and use a HEPA vacuum to suck it up. You can also try a product

First, remove prime stink sources: Get sneakers and sports gear out and into the sun for a day. Then mist them—plus the inside of that dank laundry basket—with an unscented deodorizing spray (it will neutralize odors rather than mask them). Strip the bedding and wash



TOP THREE MYSTERY SMELLS IN YOUR HOUSE

Yogurt spill circa
2013,
halfheartedly wiped up

Old sock—
or small decomposing
rodent?—trapped
under radiator

Pet accident
that everyone else
in the house was strangely
(no, conveniently) blind to

everything. Going forward, emphasize prompt laundering. You can make laundry idiot- (or, ahem, teen-) proof by stocking self-measuring detergent. Your kid just has to squeeze the bottle once for the right amount. “Try using booster beads in your wash loads. They keep clothing and bedding smelling fresher for longer,” Kuper adds. A jar of odor-neutralizing gel somewhere in the room will further help clear the air—just remove the seal, replace the slotted lid and let it soak up stink—as will regular passes with a HEPA-filter-equipped vacuum.

Products: Zero Odor Multi-Purpose Household Odor Eliminator, amazon.com, \$16. Downy Sport Odor Defense Beads, jet.com, \$9. Shark Navigator Lift-Away Professional, amazon.com, \$180. Seventh Generation EasyDose Ultra-Concentrated Laundry Detergent, amazon.com, \$25 for 2. Fresh Wave Odor Removing Gel, target.com, \$10.



There's also a perma-pee scent in your powder room.

OK, we're not gonna point fingers, but you suspect a certain 15-year-old may still have aim issues. Potpourri isn't going to do it: Instead, mist the entire area, including walls and toilet base, with an enzyme cleaner, let sit for 10 minutes, then wipe away. “The enzymes attack the urine odor,” Maker says. A hard-surface steam cleaner

can also keep pee scent at bay (and bathrooms squeaky-clean): The pressurized hot steam dislodges gunk. Post-steam treatment, pat the area with a dry cloth.

Products: Biokleen Bac-Out Stain & Odor Eliminator with Live Enzyme Cultures, walgreens.com, \$9.50. Reliable Pronto Portable Steam Cleaner, walmart.com, \$99.



A banana peel spent the night in your car.

To remove rank car aromas, sprinkle upholstery and carpets with baking soda and let sit in the closed car for at least 30 minutes, then HEPA-vacuum it up, says natural-cleaning expert Marilee Nelson, cofounder of Branch Basics. And tuck an activated-charcoal filter bag somewhere in your car. It will be much more effective than ye olde piña colada-scented pine tree air freshener. If the worst happens—you splash caramel-brûlée latte with whipped cream on your carpeted floor, which, when left unattended, can truly make your vehicle smell like something died in there—act fast. Clean it with an enzyme cleaner, following the product instructions, says Kuper.

Products: Moso 200-Gram Natural Air Purifying Bag, bedbathandbeyond.com, \$10. Speed Cleaning Stain Gobbler Concentrate, speedcleaning.com, \$11.



There's a grass stain on your daughter's treasured team shirt.

A tricky one even for seasoned stain whisperers, but there's hope! "I use Fels Naptha soap as a stain treater," Kuper says. "It will remove almost anything, including stains you may have thought were impossible to remove and mystery stains." Another tactic for smudges, provided the fabric can take it: Nelson says to rub undiluted dish soap directly into the splotch, cover the item with hot water in the washer, agitate just a bit to create suds and let soak overnight.

Products: Fels Naptha Heavy Duty Laundry Bar Soap, amazon.com, \$6. Mrs. Meyer's Dish Soap, mrsmeyers.com, \$4. Branch Basics The Concentrate, branchbasics.com, \$49.



The stains on your sofa aren't obvious, but they're there and—like your teen—have been hanging out for a while.

Wet each spot, dab on a tiny bit of dish soap (not too much, or you'll spend time removing a ton of suds too) and wipe with a damp cloth, Maker says. (You might want to consider treating a hidden area first as a test run.) Let dry and repeat as needed. If there's a stubborn spot that's identifiable (cabernet slosh from last month's book club, ice cream schmutz from that recent birthday party), apply a stain product specifically formulated to break down that particular substance, like Carbona Stain Devils, each of which contains different targeted ingredients. (If this is a slipcover situation and you can launder after treatment, all the better.)

Products: Carbona Stain Devils System, carbona.com, \$32.



One of the good hand towels has fallen victim to your teenager's tinted moisturizer (or latest hair dye experiment).

Soak the towel in an oxygen-bleach solution overnight, then launder in the hottest possible water for the fabric. Whether or not your bath linens can be resuscitated, it's time to bring in some designated makeup/beauty experiment towels that are black or busily patterned. Conspicuously stash the pile in bathroom drawers; now there's no excuse for anyone to muck up your nice ones. (You can even get washcloths with the word "makeup" embroidered right on—because why not

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literally spell it out for your smoky eye-obsessed offspring?)

Products: OxiClean Versatile Stain Remover, amazon.com, \$13. Turkish Towel Black Makeup Washcloth Towels, turkishtowelcompany.com, \$28 for 6.



Dust is all up in your ceiling fans and fixtures—among other annoying places.

Unfortunately, out of reach doesn't mean out of sight (or mind). But there are ways to remove that sooty black fur from high-up items. "Use an old pillowcase to clean ceiling fan blades," Maker says. "Slide the

case over a blade at a time and drag it off, clasping with your hands." (If crud won't budge thanks to airborne grease, shake up equal parts dish soap and vinegar in a spray bottle and mist away. Let soak for a minute or so, then drag the dingy layer off and wipe clean with a dry cloth.) Her similarly efficient method for dusting light fixtures: Use a dry microfiber cloth on a cooled pendant. "It removes and traps dust so it doesn't go flying everywhere." To conquer all your most inconvenient dusting tasks in one fell swoop, arm yourself with a long-handled microfiber duster. Got pleated lampshades with an allergy-inducing fuzz factor? Once in a while, sweep out the fabric crevices with a toothbrush to prevent dust colonies from forming (you can cue up your favorite podcast for distraction purposes).

Products: OXO Good Grips Microfiber Extendable Duster, bedbathandbeyond.com, \$15.



Fingerprints and scuffs have you feeling like repainting the entire house.

Time to bust out the cult-favorite sponge of parents everywhere: Magic Eraser. (Forget smartphones—what did we do before these were a thing?) Wet the scrubber, squeeze to remove excess water, then gently glide it along any marks to remove. Just be sure to test in an inconspicuous area to ensure your paint is eraser-safe (if just a hint of paint appears on the sponge, try gliding with less gusto). Another effective trick: Use a vinegar/water mix on a washcloth, adding a pinch of baking soda to gently slough off stubborn marks. Then wipe any residue away.

Products: Mr. Clean Magic Eraser Original Cleaning Pads with Durafoam, target.com, \$4.





This one goes out
to all the SUPERMOMS
who are killing it
on their cleaning
challenges—one
crazy mess at
a time.

Drop the
mic...

and now the mop.
(And take a
lesson, kids.
Because next
time, you're going
in with me.)