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Living WELL

A Newsletter of
Family and Consumer Sciences

<http://sites.ext.vt.edu/livingwell/>

RADON: A Health Hazard With a Simple Solution

By Sarah Burkett, M.A.T.

Radon is a cancer-causing, natural radioactive gas that you can't see, smell, or taste. Radon comes from the natural (radioactive) breakdown of uranium in soil, rock, and water and gets into the air you breathe. Its presence in your home can pose a danger to your family's health. Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer among nonsmokers. **Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in America, and it claims about 20,000 lives annually.** One of every 15 homes in the United States is estimated to have elevated radon levels.

Protect your family. **Test your home for radon – it's easy and inexpensive. The amount of radon in the air is measured in "picocuries per liter of air" or pCi/L. Fix your home if you have a radon level of 4 pCi/L or more.**

The only way to tell if a building has elevated radon levels is to test. The Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Surgeon General recommend that all homes be tested. You can test your home yourself or hire a professional. Test kits are available through the mail, in hardware stores, and from home improvement stores.

You can fix a radon problem. Radon-reduction systems work and are not expensive. Some radon-reduction systems can reduce radon levels in your home by up to 99 percent. Even high levels can be reduced to acceptable levels.

Sarah Burkett is a Family and Consumer Sciences Extension agent in Pulaski County.



Images courtesy of AccuStar Labs

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For more information about radon, visit:

- EPA radon homepage:
www.epa.gov/radon
- EPA's "A Citizen's Guide to Radon: The Guide to Protecting Yourself and Your Family From Radon":
www.epa.gov/radon/pubs/citguide.html
- EPA radon publications:
www.epa.gov/radon/pubs/index.html
- Virginia radon contacts:
www.epa.gov/radon/states/virginia.html
- National Radon Hotline:
(800) 767-7236
- National Radon Helpline:
(800) 557-2366
- National Radon Fix-It Line:
(800) 644-6999





Make Your Home a Safe Place for Those With Allergies and Asthma

By Kimberly Elkins, CHES

Does it seem like every family you know has someone who suffers from allergies or asthma? That is because over 60 million Americans, or one out of every four, suffer from these conditions, and that number is on the rise!

An allergy is an altered response of the immune system. It occurs when a substance causes an overreaction in a person's body, resulting in a broad range of symptoms. Asthma is a disorder of the lungs. During an asthma attack, airways become narrow or blocked, causing breathing difficulty, wheezing, coughing, chest tightness, and other symptoms. Often, asthma episodes are triggered by an allergic reaction.

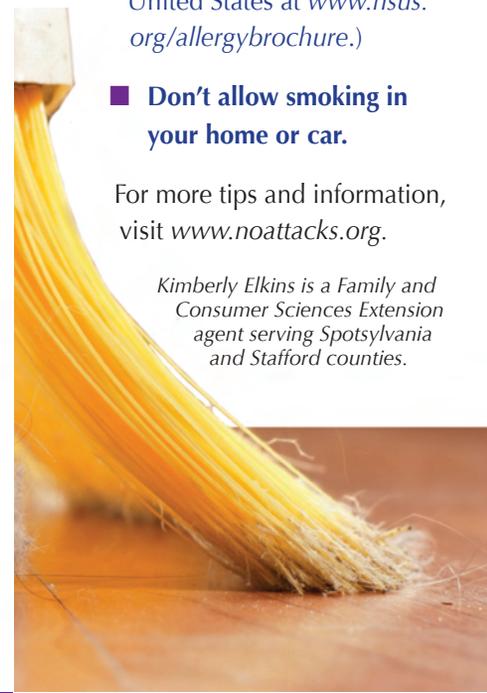
There are no cures for allergies or asthma. However, they can be managed with careful prevention and treatment. One of the most important steps is to remove allergy and asthma triggers from your home. Check out the following tips to see how you can help protect your family and those who visit your home.

- **Clean your house often. If possible, have someone without allergies or asthma do the cleaning, or wear a dust mask.**
- **Remove household clutter and take out your trash regularly. (See article on controlling clutter in this issue.)**
- **Follow the furnace manufacturer's instructions to replace your air filter regularly.**
- **Remove carpeting or use a vacuum with a High-Efficiency Particle Air (HEPA) filter.**
- **Cover pillows and mattresses with a zippered plastic cover (available at local department stores).**
- **Wash bedding every week in hot water.**
- **Fix plumbing leaks, drips, and cracks to control mold and pest problems.**
- **Don't have pets, or keep pets out of your bedroom and off fabric-covered furniture. (For more suggestions, see Your Allergies and Your Pet, available online from the Humane Society of the United States at www.hsus.org/allergybrochure.)**

- **Don't allow smoking in your home or car.**

For more tips and information, visit www.noattacks.org.

Kimberly Elkins is a Family and Consumer Sciences Extension agent serving Spotsylvania and Stafford counties.



What Can Trigger Allergy or Asthma Attacks?

- ✓ **Cleaning or personal-care products**
- ✓ **Cigarette smoke**
- ✓ **Pollen**
- ✓ **Pet dander**
- ✓ **Dust mites**
- ✓ **Mold**
- ✓ **Roaches**



National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences

The *Living Well* newsletter was developed by the Family and Consumer Sciences program, Karen Roth Gehrt, associate director. The *Living Well* Editorial Board – co-chaired by C. Sprenger, Augusta County, and E. Schlenker, Virginia Tech – includes A-C Carrington, Central District; D. Baskfield-Heath, James City County; J. Henderson, Amelia County; A. Jewell, Lancaster County; and K. Poff, Shenandoah and Frederick counties. I. Leech, associate professor, apparel, housing, and resource management, Virginia Tech, also reviewed this issue.

Produced by Communications and Marketing, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Virginia Tech

www.ext.vt.edu

Fall 2009

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MOLD and YOUR HOME

Clip and Save

Do you ever wonder about the safe way to dispose of worn-out batteries, leftover paint, or other household chemicals? Would you like to know how to prevent other dangers in your home, such as electrical shock, burns, or accidental poisoning? The websites below offer advice on how to protect both your family and the environment.

Household Hazardous Waste Management. Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. This state agency offers advice on disposal of hazardous materials and provides links to local sources of information; www.deq.state.va.us/waste/householdhw.html.

Household Waste Management. Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering, Purdue University, and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. This website displays a virtual house and lists the potentially hazardous household chemicals you might find in each room; www.purdue.edu/envirosoft/housewaste/src/open.htm.

Healthy Homes Partnership. U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and Alabama Cooperative Extension System. Healthy Homes Partnership provides comprehensive advice on healthy homes and keeping children safe, with quizzes to evaluate your home's safety and publications to assist both educators and consumers; www.healthyhomespartnership.net/.

By Eleanor Schlenker, Ph.D., R.D.

Following Hurricane Katrina, we heard of the health problems and huge cleanup costs related to mold. Although we often associate mold with extensive water damage from floods, even small leaks can lead to mold.

Molds are microscopic fungi that perform a useful function outdoors, where they break down leaves, dead wood, or other plant debris. Molds become a problem when they start digesting materials in our homes, such as insulation, ceiling tiles, or wallpaper. Mold needs moisture to grow, so you can prevent mold growth by keeping your home dry. Mold often grows in kitchens, bathrooms, or laundry rooms with high humidity and water use or in air conditioners. Leaky roofs and leaky sinks lead to mold growth, and once building materials or furnishings get wet, mold begins to grow within six hours. A "musty" odor often indicates the presence of mold. Mildew is a common form of mold.

Molds produce tiny spores or specks that float through the air and enter the lungs. It is not healthy to live where mold is growing, but infants, children, the elderly, and persons with compromised immune function are affected most. People with allergies to mold may get headaches, watery eyes, itching, sneezing, or have trouble breathing. Exposure to molds can trigger attacks in those with asthma.

A very important component of mold remediation is removing the source of moisture to prevent the growth or return of the mold. To remove small patches of mold (10 square feet or less), follow these guidelines:

- Make needed repairs or increase ventilation to prevent moisture buildup and mold return.
- Protect yourself with long sleeves and pants, rubber gloves reaching the middle of your forearm, eye goggles, and a half-face N-95 respirator (possibly with a HEPA filter), available at most hardware stores.
- Remove carpets, furniture, or other moldy materials to avoid spreading mold to other parts of your house.
- Clean hard surfaces with an all-purpose cleaner or detergent solution and dry thoroughly. **Chlorine bleach is not recommended for general mold removal.**

For more information on mold see:

Mold Basics, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 2901-7019; <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/2901/2901-7019/2901-7019.html>

Mold Prevention, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 2901-7020; <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/2901/2901-7020/2901-7020.html>

Mold Remediation, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 2901-7021; <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/2901/2901-7021/2901-7021.html>

Eleanor Schlenker is an Extension specialist at Virginia Tech.



Welcome to Living Well

Welcome to the Fall 2009 edition of Living Well, coming to you from Family and Consumer Sciences of Virginia Cooperative Extension. This issue focuses on healthy homes and was funded by the Healthy Homes Partnership of the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Housing and Urban Development. We hope this information will help you and yours keep your home safe and "Live Well." If you have comments or suggestions about this newsletter, you can reach us at (540) 231-2450, livingwell@vt.edu, or Editor, 110 Hutcheson, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24061-0908. We would love to hear from you!

NOTE: Rising postal rates continue to erode our budget for Living Well. If you have access to e-mail and the Internet and could receive your copy of Living Well electronically, we would appreciate hearing from you. Our e-mail readers receive their copy on the day our printed copies go to the post office, so you would actually hear from us a few days sooner. To change your subscription from postal mail to e-mail, call, write, or e-mail the Virginia Cooperative Extension office in your county. You can find their contact information at www.ext.vt.edu/offices. If you currently receive your subscription by e-mail, there's no need to be in touch with us.

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Contact Karen Roth Gehrt at gehrtk@vt.edu or (540) 231-9347.

We gratefully acknowledge the funding received from the Healthy Homes Partnership of USDA and HUD and administered by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System for this special Healthy Homes issue of Living Well.

Controlling Clutter

By Jennifer Abel, M.S., AFC®

In our busy lives, it's hard to always stay as organized as we would like to be. Excessive clutter can lead to more serious problems than not being able to find last year's tax return. Asthma or allergies can result when piles on surfaces prevent proper cleaning. Boxes and other clutter on floors can make it hard to get out of the house in the event of an emergency. So how can you find time to keep things organized amidst your daily schedule? These simple tips can help.

Look for related items and gather them together. If you're organizing papers, for example, select specific places for receipts, bills to be paid, to-do lists, notes, etc.

Dispose of unneeded or duplicate items. Do you really need four sets of measuring cups? Is your closet full of clothes that you haven't worn for years? Get rid of items that no longer serve a purpose, and you'll have room for the things that need a home.



Choose containers for each group of items. When organizing papers, consider which kind of container will work best for each stack. File folders, three-ring binders, large envelopes, and boxes are natural choices.

Choose a home for each container. Store frequently used papers in convenient locations.

Here are some helpful hints for tackling clutter one room at a time:

- ◆ Divide items among the following containers: (1) things to throw away, (2) things to recycle, (3) things to donate, (4) things to sell, and (5) things to keep that need to be put in their proper storage space.
- ◆ Work with a friend who will help ask the necessary questions, like "When are you actually going to use that again?"
- ◆ Set a timer and devote half an hour or an hour to decluttering.
- ◆ For each item that you pick up, ask yourself, "How long has it been since I used this? If I keep this, what will I give up to make room for it?"

With these easy tips, clutter in your home can soon be a thing of the past.

Jennifer Abel is a Family and Consumer Sciences Extension agent in Arlington.

For more information, contact your local Extension office.
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