

How Healthy is Your Home?

by Alison Main

Do you only buy organic foods? Do you start your mornings with a sun salutation? Do you detox with a juice cleanse once a month? We invest so much of our precious time and resources to get healthy and stay healthy. But, have we stopped to consider the impact of our home's environmental health on our bodies and physical development?

It's estimated that we spend as much as 90% of our time indoors. So, if we're really serious about wellness, then we need to take a much closer look at where we eat, sleep, work, and live. Outside of our pristinely manicured lawns, impeccable interior décor, and masterful chef's kitchens, there's an entire angle of holistic wellness that's often overlooked – your indoor built environment.

Recent decades have seen a dramatic increase in allergies and sensitivities, autoimmune diseases, developmental and behavioral disorders, and chronic illnesses. Parents now pack sunbutter sandwiches instead of peanut butter treats in their kids' lunchboxes, and we all ensure properly labeled gluten-free cupcakes at every birthday party. Everyone knows how to work an epipen. And our elementary schools even give out "Food Sensitivities Awareness" stickers. This concerning trend toward environmental illness is not without coincidence. We've reached a tipping point where our immune systems are struggling to process the upsurge of toxins and chemicals invading our food, water, air, cosmetics, cleaning products, and clothing materials. And our interior environments have taken a major hit.

Some examples of indoor environmental hazards include:

1. Toxins and indoor climate (e.g. Volatile Organic Compounds or VOCs, toxic gases, solvents, heavy metals)

2. Fields, waves and radiation (e.g. radiofrequency, electrical and magnetic fields, sound and vibration, and geological disturbances)

3. Fungi, bacteria, and allergens (e.g. molds, yeast, dust mites)

4. Light quality and UV exposure
5. Building materials

So, great. Our world is toxic. Our homes might be as well. What can we do about this? Quite a lot, actually. And a superior place to start is with a comprehensive inspection by a Certified Building Biologist to assess for environmental stressors in your home.

A "Building Biologist," you say? Is that a real thing? It certainly is. Building Biology is the holistic study of the relationship between our bodies and our man-made built environment. Also termed "Bau-Biologie," this international movement was born out of Post-WWII Germany to deal with "sick building syndrome" – a.k.a. the health problems and sensitivities that emerged from the chemicals used in the construction of new housing in the years, after the war. Building Biology ensures that homes are built in accordance with the laws of nature, and considers what resonates with our bodies holistically. Our homes should be a place where we can rest, relax, and recuperate. And we can attain that balance in our living structures by using nature as the ultimate guide.

Not to be confused with the "Green movement," Building Biology's primary focus is creating indoor environments that support human health. In contrast, the Green movement is mostly concerned with the sustainability of the planet. Paradoxically, many "Green" products are not actually healthy for us humans. A prime example is a compact fluorescent light bulb. This product is considered "Green" for our earth because it is energy efficient. But it contains unhealthy mercury vapor and produces electromagnetic fields – both harmful to humans. Ultimately, Building Biology marries the health of the planet with the health of humans in indoor environments.

So, do I practice what I preach? Absolutely. In January of 2014, I was in the midst of a neurological breakdown, precipitated by an intense static electricity vortex in my home, instigated by a new chemically-infused synthetic microfiber couch I

had recently purchased from a prominent furniture retailer. I found myself fleeing my dwelling for twelve hours per day, all to avoid these unseen toxins that were wreaking havoc on my neuro-immune system.

During one outing, I escaped to a nearby nail salon for a manicure. In retrospect, an ironic choice, as I left one toxic environment for another, subsequently breathing in a plethora of formaldehyde-based nail chemicals (I still had much to learn). Waiting for my "Lincoln Park After Dark" painted nails to dry, I delicately picked up my cell, and desperately Googled "Environmental Home Consultant New York" and happened upon the Healthy Dwellings website and Matthew Waletzke, a Certified Building Biology Consultant (BBEC) at Healthy Dwellings. I immediately sent him what amounted to a "HELP ME!" plea of an email (messages he undoubtedly receives on a frequent basis), and I was met with a gracious, calming, and professional response.

A few days later, he arrived at my door with his suitcase of seemingly magical wands and mysterious gadgets – all the tools needed to conduct a thorough home inspection. And inspect he did – for mold, EMF levels, indoor air quality, and chemicals. His proposed strategies alleviated the toxic burdens in my home. And I have since worked with both Waletzke and building biology consultants in all of my living spaces, even in advance of purchasing or renting (you can learn more about building biology and find a local consultant at the International Institute for Building Biology and Ecology (IBE) website at www.hbelc.org).

A building biologist will not only pinpoint the source of the exposure, but will also offer viable solutions. And if you heed this advice, you'll create a holistically healthy home that allows your body to truly attain equilibrium and regenerate. Service offerings differ amongst building biologists' areas of expertise, with inspections usually tailored to the specific concerns presented by the homeowner. For an overall precau-

tionary evaluation, an inspection will run approximately two to four hours, sometimes with post-inspection environmental lab testing. Most building biologists will provide a detailed written report with their findings and specific action-points. And some of these professionals also provide consultation services on remodeling and new construction – essential nowadays, given the gamut of unnatural, synthetic building materials readily used in development.

You don't need to be in the midst of a cataclysmic health collapse to benefit from a healthier home environment. In an era where chemical, biological, and electromagnetic toxins run rampant, we often don't realize how harmful all of this can be – particularly for our developing children – until the offending agent is mitigated and remediated. The fact is, your home could be making you sick, or keeping you sick, despite all other efforts you've made toward healing. Our body absorbs toxins in any environment – through our skin, our lungs, and overall exposure. From your refrigerator grate which may be a black mold breeding ground, to your WiFi router which may be causing insomnia if next to your bed, to your ventilation system which may be trapping toxins in stale air, these are environmental concerns with some serious health consequences. And you don't have to live with them.

So, we can religiously follow Gwyneth Paltrow's pure lifestyle tips on "goop," we can hit the gym with our bright orange Klean Kanteens, and we can feng shui our spaces with a lauded master. But real health transformation starts inside our living spaces. We are humans and an integral part of nature. It's time all our homes reflect that.

Alison Main is a freelance writer living in Pelham Manor. She focuses on natural living, clinical nutrition, and EMF safety. Echoing her own wellness journey, she is dedicated to helping others heal from environmental illness through holistic methods and philosophies.