

Breathe Better, Live Healthier

Indoor Air Quality & Home Health Guide



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The Homeowner's Guide to Indoor Air Quality and Mold Prevention

Learn Why Standard Air Purifiers Aren't Enough and How Active Air Purification Systems Protect Your Family

By Chad Gardner, Owner, A Nu-Look Cleaning, Construction & Restoration, 25+ Years of Home Services and Indoor Air Quality Expertise

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Introduction: Why Indoor Air Quality Matters

You spend approximately 90 percent of your life indoors. Whether at home, at work, or in your car, the air you breathe inside these spaces has a profound impact on your health, energy levels, and overall quality of life. Yet most people give little thought to the quality of the air they're breathing.

The truth is, indoor air can be significantly more polluted than outdoor air. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has identified indoor air quality as one of the top five environmental health risks. Poor indoor air quality can contribute to respiratory diseases, heart disease, allergies, asthma, and other serious health conditions.

This e-book is designed to help you understand the hidden threats lurking in your home's air, identify the symptoms of poor air quality, and discover the most effective solutions to protect your family's health. Whether you're dealing with mold, dust, allergens, or chemical pollutants, you'll learn practical strategies to improve your indoor environment.

Over the past 25 years, I've helped thousands of homeowners and businesses identify and address indoor air quality problems. Through my work in cleaning, restoration, and construction, I've seen firsthand how poor air quality affects families and how the right solutions can transform homes into healthier living environments.

In this guide, I'll share what I've learned about the three main approaches to air purification: passive filtration systems, standard air purifiers, and active air purification technology. You'll discover the significant differences between these approaches and why some are far more effective than others. I'll also explain how professional services like carpet cleaning, air duct cleaning, and mold remediation contribute to better air quality.

Your family's health is too important to leave to chance. By the time you finish this e-book, you'll have the knowledge and tools to create a healthier home environment for everyone you love.

Chapter 1: The Hidden Threat in Your Home

Most people assume their homes are safe havens from air pollution. After all, you close your doors and windows to keep outdoor pollution out. But the reality is far more complex. Indoor air can contain numerous pollutants that accumulate over time, creating an environment that's actually more hazardous than the air outside. The EPA has conducted extensive research on indoor air quality and found that the average American spends about 90 percent of their time indoors. This means that for most people, indoor air quality has a far greater impact on their health than outdoor air quality. Yet indoor air quality receives a fraction of the attention that outdoor air pollution does.

EPA Statistics and Health Impacts

According to the EPA, indoor air pollution can cause both immediate and long-term health effects. Short-term effects include irritation of the eyes, nose, and throat, headaches, dizziness, and fatigue. These symptoms are usually temporary and resolve when you leave the polluted environment. Long-term exposure to indoor air pollutants can lead to serious health conditions including respiratory diseases, heart disease, cancer, and cognitive deficits. Vulnerable populations—including children, elderly individuals, and people with pre-existing health conditions—are at particular risk.

Common Indoor Air Pollutants

Indoor air can contain numerous types of pollutants:

Particulate Matter (PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀): Tiny particles that remain suspended in air, including dust, pollen, and smoke

Mold and Mildew: Fungal spores that thrive in moist environments and cause respiratory issues

Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs): Chemicals released from furniture, paints, cleaners, and building materials

Biological Contaminants: Bacteria, viruses, and allergens from pets, people, and pests

Radon: A naturally occurring radioactive gas that seeps into homes from soil

Environmental Tobacco Smoke: Secondhand smoke containing thousands of chemicals

Combustion Byproducts: Carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide from gas stoves and furnaces

Chapter 2: Understanding Indoor Air Pollutants

To effectively improve your indoor air quality, you need to understand what pollutants are present in your home and where they come from. Different pollutants require different solutions, so identifying what you're dealing with is the first step toward creating a healthier environment.

Particulate Matter

Particulate matter includes all the tiny particles suspended in your air—dust, pollen, pet dander, skin cells, and smoke particles. These particles are measured by size, with PM2.5 (particles 2.5 micrometers or smaller) being of particular concern because they can penetrate deep into your lungs. Particulate matter comes from numerous sources: outdoor air infiltration, cooking, cleaning, pets, and deteriorating building materials. Even activities like vacuuming can temporarily increase particulate matter levels if you're not using proper filtration.

Mold and Biological Contaminants

Mold is one of the most common indoor air quality problems. Mold spores are always present in the air, but they only grow when conditions are right—specifically, when there's moisture and organic material to feed on. Once mold begins growing, it releases spores into the air that can cause respiratory problems, allergies, and asthma attacks. Biological contaminants also include bacteria, viruses, and allergens. These are particularly concerning in homes with pets, young children, or elderly residents. Proper ventilation and air purification can significantly reduce biological contaminants.

Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs)

VOCs are chemicals that evaporate at room temperature and become part of your indoor air. They come from numerous sources including furniture, carpets, paints, varnishes, cleaning products, air fresheners, and even new appliances. Many VOCs have known health effects ranging from eye and throat irritation to more serious conditions with long-term exposure. The problem with VOCs is that they're often invisible and odorless until they accumulate to levels that cause symptoms. This is why many people experience symptoms when they bring new furniture into their homes or have new carpet installed—they're experiencing VOC off-gassing.

Chapter 3: Health Symptoms and When to Worry

How do you know if your home has an indoor air quality problem? Often, the first sign is physical symptoms. Understanding these symptoms and knowing when they indicate a serious problem is important for protecting your family's health.

Common Symptoms of Poor Indoor Air Quality

If you or your family members experience any of these symptoms, especially when indoors, it may indicate an indoor air quality problem:

- Persistent cough or wheezing

- Nasal congestion or sinus issues

- Eye, nose, or throat irritation

- Skin irritation or rashes

- Fatigue or difficulty concentrating
- Headaches
- Asthma attacks or worsening of asthma
- Allergic reactions
- Shortness of breath

When to Take Action

If symptoms resolve when you leave your home and return when you come back, this is a strong indication of an indoor air quality problem. Similarly, if multiple family members experience symptoms at the same time, this suggests an environmental cause rather than individual illness. You should consider professional air quality testing if you notice persistent symptoms, visible mold growth, musty odors, or if someone in your home has respiratory conditions like asthma or COPD. Professional testing can identify specific pollutants and help you determine the best course of action.

Chapter 4: Passive Filtration Systems Explained

Passive filtration is the most common approach to air purification in homes. These systems work by pulling air through filters that trap particles and contaminants. Understanding how these systems work and their limitations is essential for making informed decisions about your home's air quality.

How HEPA Filters Work

HEPA (High-Efficiency Particulate Air) filters are the gold standard for mechanical filtration. These filters are made of a dense mat of randomly arranged fibers that trap particles as air passes through. HEPA filters can capture 99.97 percent of particles 0.3 micrometers or larger. The way HEPA filters work is through several mechanisms. Larger particles are trapped by interception (particles following air streamlines touch the fiber), impaction (particles can't follow the air stream around a fiber and hit it directly), and diffusion (smallest particles are slowed by collision with gas molecules). This multi-mechanism approach makes HEPA filters highly effective at removing particulate matter.

Limitations of Passive Filtration

While HEPA filters are excellent at removing particulate matter, they have significant limitations. First, HEPA filters do not remove odors, gases, or VOCs. They only capture particles. If you have odor problems or chemical pollutants, a HEPA filter alone won't solve the problem. Second, passive filtration systems only clean air that passes through the filter. If you have a portable air purifier in one room, it only cleans the air in that immediate area. Pollutants in other rooms or in areas with poor air circulation won't be addressed. Third, HEPA filters require regular replacement, which can be expensive and inconvenient. A clogged filter reduces efficiency and can actually increase energy consumption as the system works harder to pull air through the blocked filter. Finally, passive systems do nothing to address pollutants that have settled on surfaces. Dust on furniture, mold on walls, or chemical residue on surfaces won't be removed by air filtration alone.

Effectiveness and Cost Analysis

Standard HEPA air purifiers typically cost \$200-\$800 for a quality unit. Replacement filters cost \$50-\$150 each and need to be replaced every 6-12 months depending on usage and air quality. Over a 5-year period, you might spend \$500-\$1,500 on filters alone. These systems are effective for removing particulate matter in a limited area, making them suitable for bedrooms or small offices. However, for whole-home air quality improvement, they have significant limitations.

Chapter 5: Standard Air Purifiers vs. Air Scrubbers

There's often confusion about the difference between air purifiers and air scrubbers. While these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they actually refer to different technologies with very different capabilities. Understanding these differences is crucial for choosing the right solution for your home.

Standard Air Purifiers

Standard air purifiers are designed for continuous operation in homes and offices. They typically use HEPA filtration as their primary purification method. These units are relatively quiet, designed to blend into home décor, and require regular filter changes. Standard air purifiers work by pulling air through an intake, passing it through filters, and releasing cleaned air back into the room. They're effective at removing particulate matter but limited in addressing other pollutants. Most standard air purifiers cost between \$200-\$800 and are designed for single-room use.

Air Scrubbers: Industrial-Grade Technology

Air scrubbers are industrial-grade devices originally designed for use on construction sites, during mold remediation, and in commercial settings. Unlike standard air purifiers, air scrubbers use multiple purification methods simultaneously:

- Mechanical filtration (HEPA or similar)
- Chemical agents for VOC removal
- Ionizers to neutralize particles
- UV light to kill microorganisms

Air scrubbers are designed to clean large volumes of air quickly and thoroughly. They're more powerful than standard air purifiers and can address a wider range of pollutants. However, they're also louder and more expensive than standard air purifiers.

Key Differences

Filtration Method: Standard: HEPA only | Scrubber: Multiple methods

Pollutant Coverage: Standard: Particulate only | Scrubber: Particles, gases, VOCs, biologicals

Noise Level: Standard: Quiet (40-60 dB) | Scrubber: Louder (60-80 dB)

Coverage Area: Standard: Single room | Scrubber: Larger areas/whole home

Maintenance: Standard: Frequent filter changes | Scrubber: Less frequent maintenance

Cost: Standard: \$200-\$800 | Scrubber: \$1,500-\$5,000+

Speed: Standard: Gradual cleaning | Scrubber: Rapid air cleaning

Chapter 6: Active Air Purification Technology

Active air purification represents a significant advancement in indoor air quality technology. Unlike passive systems that wait for air to come to them, active systems actively treat air and surfaces throughout your space. This fundamental difference results in dramatically superior performance.

How Active Air Purification Works

Active air purification systems work by creating purifying molecules that travel throughout your space, treating air and surfaces wherever they go. Rather than relying on air to pass through a filter, active systems distribute purification throughout the entire room or home. The most advanced active systems use photohydroionization (PHI) technology combined with UV light. This process creates hydrogen peroxide and other oxidizing molecules that neutralize pollutants, kill microorganisms, and break down VOCs. These molecules are safe for human exposure at the levels produced by residential systems but highly effective at eliminating pollutants.

Photohydroionization (PHI) Technology

Photohydroionization is a patented technology that uses a combination of UV light and a catalyst to create purifying molecules. When air passes through the PHI cell, water vapor and oxygen in the air are converted into hydrogen peroxide and other oxidizing molecules. These molecules are released into the air where they actively seek out and neutralize pollutants. This technology is particularly effective because it addresses pollutants that passive systems miss. VOCs are broken down into harmless compounds. Mold spores are killed. Bacteria and viruses are neutralized. Surface contamination is also addressed because the purifying molecules settle on surfaces and continue working there. The beauty of PHI technology is that it's safe for continuous operation in occupied spaces. The levels of hydrogen peroxide produced are well below levels that would cause any health concerns, yet they're highly effective at eliminating pollutants.

Aerus Air Scrubber: Professional-Grade Solution

The Aerus Air Scrubber represents the pinnacle of active air purification technology for residential use. Combining advanced PHI technology with HEPA filtration, the Aerus Air Scrubber provides comprehensive air quality improvement. The Aerus system works on multiple levels. The PHI cell creates purifying molecules that treat air throughout your home. The HEPA filter captures particulate matter. Together, these technologies address virtually all indoor air pollutants—particles, gases, VOCs, mold spores, bacteria, and viruses. One of the key advantages of the Aerus Air Scrubber is that it's designed for whole-home installation. Rather than treating a single room, it integrates with your existing HVAC system to purify all the air circulating through your home. This means consistent air quality in every room, not just where a portable unit is placed. For more information about Aerus Air Scrubber technology and how it can improve your home's air quality, visit www.aerusairscrubber.com.

Chapter 7: Comparing the Three Approaches

Now that you understand how each technology works, let's compare them directly. This comparison will help you make an informed decision about which approach is best for your situation.

Feature	Passive Filtration	Air Scrubbers	Active Systems (Aerus)
Particulate Removal	99.97%	99.97%	99.97%
VOC/Gas Removal	No	Yes	Yes
Mold Spore Elimination	Capture only	Kill & Capture	Kill & Capture
Bacteria/Virus Elimination	No	Yes	Yes
Surface Purification	No	Limited	Yes
Coverage Area	Single room	Large area	Whole home
Maintenance	Frequent	Minimal	Minimal
Initial Cost	\$200-\$800	\$1,500-\$5,000	\$2,000-\$4,000

Comprehensive Comparison

Which Approach is Right for You?

The right choice depends on your specific situation, budget, and air quality concerns. Choose Passive Filtration if: You have a limited budget, only need to treat one room, and your primary concern is particulate matter like dust and pollen. Choose Air Scrubbers if: You need rapid air cleaning for a specific project (like mold remediation or construction cleanup), or you need to treat a large area temporarily. Choose Active Systems (Aerus) if: You want comprehensive, whole-home air quality improvement; you have concerns about mold, VOCs, or biological contaminants; or you want the most effective long-term solution for your family's health. For most homeowners concerned about comprehensive indoor air quality and family health, active systems like the Aerus Air Scrubber represent the best long-term investment.

Chapter 8: Common Indoor Air Quality Issues

Every home has unique air quality challenges. Understanding the most common issues and their sources is the first step toward addressing them effectively.

Mold and Moisture Problems

Mold is one of the most common and serious indoor air quality problems. Mold grows wherever there's moisture and organic material—bathrooms, basements, attics, and around windows are common problem areas. Mold releases spores into the air that can cause respiratory problems, allergies, and asthma attacks. If you notice musty odors, visible mold growth, or water stains, you have a moisture problem that needs immediate attention. The key to mold prevention is controlling moisture through proper ventilation, fixing leaks, and maintaining humidity levels below 50 percent.

Dust and Allergens

Dust accumulation is inevitable in any home, but excessive dust indicates poor air circulation or inadequate filtration. Dust contains particles from numerous sources—dead skin cells, pet dander, fabric fibers, and outdoor particles that infiltrate your home. For people with allergies or asthma, dust can trigger serious symptoms. Regular cleaning, proper filtration, and air purification can significantly reduce dust levels and improve air quality.

Pet Dander and Odors

Pet owners know that pets can significantly impact indoor air quality. Pet dander (tiny skin flakes) is a common allergen, and pet odors can be difficult to eliminate. Pet hair also clogs filters and reduces air circulation. While you can't eliminate pets, you can minimize their impact through regular grooming, frequent vacuuming with HEPA filters, and air purification systems designed to handle pet dander and odors.

Cooking and Combustion Byproducts

Cooking releases numerous pollutants into your air—particulate matter from cooking, VOCs from heating oils, and nitrogen dioxide from gas stoves. These pollutants can accumulate to unhealthy levels, especially in homes with poor ventilation. Proper kitchen ventilation is essential. Using your range hood while cooking and ensuring it vents to the outside (not recirculating) is one of the most important steps you can take. Additionally, air purification systems can help remove cooking-related pollutants.

Off-Gassing from Furniture and Materials

New furniture, carpets, paint, and building materials release VOCs into your air—a process called off-gassing. This is why new homes often have a distinctive smell and why some people experience symptoms when they bring new furniture into their homes. Off-gassing typically decreases over time, but it can continue for months or even years with some materials. Proper ventilation and air purification can significantly reduce VOC levels and associated symptoms.

Chapter 9: Professional Services to Improve Air Quality

While air purification systems are important, they're most effective when combined with professional cleaning and maintenance services. These services address pollutants that air purification alone cannot handle.

Professional Carpet Cleaning

Carpets are one of the largest reservoirs of dust, allergens, and pollutants in your home. Regular vacuuming helps, but professional carpet cleaning removes deeply embedded contaminants that vacuums can't reach. Professional carpet cleaning uses hot water extraction or steam cleaning to penetrate deep into carpet fibers, removing dust mites, pet dander, mold spores, and chemical residues. Studies show that professional carpet cleaning can improve indoor air quality by 30-50 percent, especially for people with allergies or asthma. For best results, have your carpets professionally cleaned at least once per year, more frequently if you have pets or family members with allergies.

Air Duct Cleaning

Your HVAC system's air ducts distribute air throughout your home. Over time, these ducts accumulate dust, mold spores, and other contaminants. When your system runs, these pollutants are circulated throughout your home. Professional air duct cleaning removes accumulated contaminants from your ductwork, improving air quality and HVAC efficiency. This is particularly important if you have mold growth in your ducts, visible dust around vents, or if family members have respiratory issues. Air duct cleaning should be done every 3-5 years as part of regular home maintenance, or more frequently if you have specific air quality concerns.

HVAC System Maintenance

Your heating and cooling system is central to your home's air quality. A well-maintained HVAC system circulates clean air throughout your home, while a poorly maintained system can actually worsen air quality. Regular HVAC maintenance includes changing filters, cleaning coils, and ensuring proper airflow. Professional HVAC maintenance should be performed at least twice per year—before heating season and before cooling season. This ensures your system operates efficiently and maintains good air quality year-round.

Mold Remediation

If you have mold growth in your home, professional mold remediation is essential. While surface mold can sometimes be cleaned with bleach solutions, extensive mold problems require professional intervention. Professional mold remediation includes identifying and fixing the moisture source, safely removing mold-contaminated materials, and treating affected areas to prevent regrowth. This is not a DIY project—improper

mold remediation can actually spread mold spores throughout your home and worsen the problem. If you suspect mold in your home, contact a professional mold remediation company for assessment and treatment.

Chapter 10: Creating Your Healthy Home Action Plan

Now that you understand indoor air quality issues and solutions, it's time to create an action plan for your specific situation. This chapter will help you assess your home's air quality and prioritize improvements.

Assessment Checklist

Start by assessing your current situation. Check all that apply:

- I notice musty odors in my home
- I see visible mold growth
- Family members have respiratory symptoms indoors
- We have pets that shed
- We have visible dust accumulation
- Our home is in a humid climate
- We have a basement or crawl space
- Our home is older (pre-1980s)
- We have recently renovated or added new furniture
- Family members have allergies or asthma

Prioritizing Improvements

Based on your assessment, prioritize improvements: **Priority 1 (Address Immediately):** If you checked any of the first four items (musty odors, visible mold, respiratory symptoms, or pets), these require immediate attention. Start with professional assessment and mold remediation if needed. **Priority 2 (Address Within 3 Months):** Professional carpet cleaning and air duct cleaning should be done within three months. These services provide significant air quality improvements. **Priority 3 (Address Within 6 Months):** Install an active air purification system like the Aerus Air Scrubber. This provides ongoing air quality improvement and complements your other efforts. **Priority 4 (Ongoing Maintenance):** Establish regular maintenance routines including HVAC filter changes, professional carpet cleaning annually, and HVAC system maintenance twice yearly.

Budget-Friendly Options

If budget is a concern, start with the most cost-effective improvements: 1. Improve ventilation by opening windows when weather permits and using exhaust fans in bathrooms and kitchen 2. Reduce humidity with dehumidifiers (under \$100) 3. Use portable HEPA air purifiers in bedrooms and main living areas (\$200-\$400 each) 4. Have carpets professionally cleaned (\$200-\$500) 5. Change HVAC filters monthly (\$20-\$50) These steps can provide significant improvement at relatively low cost. As your budget allows, add professional services and upgrade to a whole-home active purification system.

Professional Solutions

For comprehensive air quality improvement, professional solutions are most effective: 1. Professional mold assessment and remediation (\$500-\$3,000 depending on extent) 2. Professional carpet cleaning (\$200-\$500 annually) 3. Air duct cleaning (\$300-\$800) 4. HVAC system maintenance (\$150-\$300 per service) 5. Aerus Air Scrubber installation (\$2,000-\$4,000) While these services represent a significant investment, they provide

lasting improvements to your family's health and your home's value. Many of these services are tax-deductible or covered by health insurance if recommended by a physician.

Maintenance Schedule

Once you've implemented your improvements, maintain them with this schedule: Monthly: Change HVAC filters, vacuum with HEPA filter Quarterly: Clean air vents and returns, wipe down surfaces Annually: Professional carpet cleaning, HVAC system maintenance Every 3-5 Years: Professional air duct cleaning, HVAC system inspection This maintenance schedule ensures your air quality improvements continue to provide benefits year after year.

Appendix A: Quick Reference Guide

INDOOR AIR QUALITY QUICK REFERENCE
Common Pollutants and Their Sources:
• Particulate Matter: Dust, pollen, pet dander, cooking particles
• Mold: Moisture-prone areas (bathrooms, basements, attics)
• VOCs: Furniture, paint, cleaners, new materials
• Biological: Bacteria, viruses, allergens
• Combustion: Gas stoves, furnaces, fireplaces
Health Symptoms Indicating Poor Air Quality:
• Persistent cough or wheezing
• Nasal congestion
• Eye, nose, or throat irritation
• Headaches or fatigue
• Asthma attacks
Immediate Actions:
1. Increase ventilation (open windows, use exhaust fans)
2. Reduce humidity (use dehumidifier, fix leaks)
3. Remove visible mold (or call professional if extensive)
4. Install portable HEPA air purifier
5. Schedule professional air quality assessment
Long-Term Solutions:
1. Professional carpet cleaning (annually)
2. Air duct cleaning (every 3-5 years)
3. HVAC maintenance (twice yearly)
4. Active air purification system (Aerus Air Scrubber)
5. Regular maintenance schedule
When to Call a Professional:
• Visible mold growth
• Musty odors you can't locate
• Respiratory symptoms in multiple family members
• Water damage or flooding
• Suspected mold in HVAC system
• Air quality concerns after renovation

Appendix B: Resources and Professional Support

RESOURCES FOR INDOOR AIR QUALITY
EPA Indoor Air Quality Information:
Website: www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq
Resources on pollutants, health effects, and solutions
Professional Organizations:
• IICRC (Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Certification): www.iicrc.org
• NADCA (National Air Duct Cleaners Association): www.nadca.org
Aerus Air Scrubber:
Website: www.aerusairscriber.com
Advanced active air purification technology
A Nu-Look Cleaning, Construction & Restoration:
Website: www.anulookcda.com
Professional indoor air quality services in Kootenai County
Services: Carpet cleaning, air duct cleaning, mold remediation, HVAC maintenance
Health Organizations:
• American Lung Association: www.lung.org
• Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America: www.aafa.org
When to Seek Professional Help:
• Air quality assessment and testing
• Mold inspection and remediation
• Professional carpet and air duct cleaning
• HVAC system maintenance and repair
• Whole-home air purification system installation

About the Author

Chad Gardner is an accomplished entrepreneur, restoration professional, and indoor environmental specialist with over 25 years of hands-on experience in the cleaning, construction, and restoration industry. His expertise spans carpet cleaning, water damage restoration, mold remediation, HVAC maintenance, and indoor air quality improvement. Through his work, Chad has helped thousands of homeowners and businesses in Kootenai County and beyond identify and resolve indoor environmental issues that threaten health and property value. His mission is to educate property owners about the importance of proactive air quality management and mold prevention. Website: www.anulookcda.com Serving Kootenai County and surrounding areas Chad's vision is to help create healthier homes and businesses, one project at a time, while promoting the importance of indoor air quality for family health and wellness.