

A Clean Start - Home Hygiene - Toolkit

The tips and advice shared in this post are suitable for people with cancer and their caregivers. We have broken down the tips and advice provided by other Belongers into two categories:

The first category focuses on the special precautions needed to prevent the spread of germs in the home that may compromise people with a lowered immune system due to cancer and its treatment.

Here are some practical tips shared by other Belongers on managing the cleaning routine and keeping your home infection-free:

- ❖ Talk to the medical team to see if there are specific recommendations on home care guidance based on your loved one's needs and treatment plan and if certain cleaning products should be excluded for home use.
- ❖ If you are the person doing the cleaning, to avoid fatigue, plan shorter, more frequent cleaning sessions. Take regular breaks in between the chores.
- ❖ Prioritize cleaning the rooms where you spend most of the time in, like the kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom.
- ❖ Wear gloves when cleaning.
- ❖ Open the windows in the room you are cleaning to remove strong fumes from cleaning products.
- ❖ Try to clean as you go. Greasy dinner plates or pans are easier to clean immediately than caked-on grease the next day.
- ❖ Stay organized by keeping all the cleaning supplies in one area.
- ❖ Do not mix bleach with ammonia or vinegar. This combination can produce toxic fumes.
- ❖ Wherever possible, avoid products containing chlorine, ammonia, synthetic solvents, and artificial fragrances and dyes. Avoid aerosol cans.
- ❖ Ask friends or family to prepare your home before your discharge from the hospital (if applicable) by ensuring that all surfaces are clean and live plants are removed from enclosed areas.
- ❖ Frequent handwashing is essential. Everyone entering the home and those who are spending time in the home should practice regular hand washing.
- ❖ High-touch areas and items such as light switches, doorknobs, telephones, tablets, remote controls, etc., should be wiped down often using disinfecting wipes.

Kitchen:

- ❖ Food preparation and kitchen hygiene to avoid bacteria and viruses is very important. Kitchen surfaces should be washed with warm, soapy water before and after you prepare food.
- ❖ Refrigerator handles, microwave doors, garbage-can lids, and faucets also need washing and sanitizing.

- ❖ Kitchen sponges/brushes often have the highest concentration of bacteria in your entire house, replace them frequently.
- ❖ Wash dish towels regularly every day or two.
- ❖ The kitchen floor should be mopped at least weekly using a clean mop.
- ❖ Clean the inside of the refrigerator and the shelves monthly, spills inside the fridge should be cleaned as soon as they happen.

Bathrooms:

- ❖ Toilets can host bacteria and viruses and should be cleaned a couple of times a week at least.
- ❖ Use a toilet-cleaning solution making sure to clean the sides and rim, the outside, seat, and handle. You may want to use a disposable toilet brush.
- ❖ The sink, faucet, shower, and countertops of toothbrushes should be cleaned weekly at least.
- ❖ Bacteria can grow on towels especially in moist places. Wash the towels in warm or hot water weekly.

Pets:

- ❖ Pets urine and poop can spread germs. Clean up and disinfect pets' mess immediately and wash your hands thoroughly. Use gloves.
- ❖ Cat litter boxes should be kept in a separate area in the house and cleaned daily. Do not keep the litter box in a place where you prepare food, cook, or eat.
- ❖ If you have a bird or other pet in a cage, change its cage liner every day using gloves.

If your loved one is receiving chemotherapy or similar medications:

- ❖ Trash should be placed in a double bag, especially if trash may contain bodily fluids.
- ❖ Wear double gloves to protect your hands when cleaning the bathroom surfaces, toilet, or cleaning up any bodily fluids such as blood, vomit, urine, and sweat.
- ❖ Laundry, including sheets and towels, should be washed separately.
- ❖ If the laundry is not washed right away, place them in a plastic bag until laundry day.
- ❖ Remember to wash your hands with soap and water after doing the laundry if you had any contact with bodily fluids on the fabric.

Extra Tips for Caregivers

Mobility issues, peripheral neuropathy, pain, or weakness after treatment might make life at home challenging for some people. Making a couple of small changes within the home may make a big difference in the life of a person recovering from or receiving cancer treatment.

- ❖ Items such as underwear, clothes, and fresh bath towels and blankets should be kept easily accessible, such as in low shelves, drawers, or baskets.
- ❖ Try to lower the patient's bed or place a footstep nearby to make getting into and out of bed easier.
- ❖ Ensure passages, stairs and hallways are well lit.
- ❖ Get rid of slippery rugs or items on the floor that can be a tripping hazard.
- ❖ Place a plastic chair with armrests in the shower or close to the sink if a hand-held shower is needed to make bathing easier or add hand grips to bathtubs.
- ❖ Place a nonslip bathmat, both in and outside the tub or shower.
- ❖ Add a portable toilet seat to the toilet for extra height or get a commode.
- ❖ Change crockery to non-breakable dishes and cups.
- ❖ Ensure there are healthy foods and snacks and food items the patient enjoys.

Over time, there may be a need to make structural changes in the home, such as a ramp, wider doorways, or a flat level entry/exit to the shower if the person uses a wheelchair.

Here are some tips to avoid infections while receiving visitors at home and when going outdoors.

- ❖ Ensure visitors and allied caregivers, including you, wash your hands with soap and warm water frequently or that hand sanitizer is applied before handling food or assisting your loved one with any tasks.
- ❖ Ensure friends and family members who are sick do not visit.
- ❖ Ensure you and your loved one wears a mask in crowds.
- ❖ Ensure the patient has received all the needed vaccines or boosters.

Note: caregivers and other people living in the home with the patient should get a flu shot and updated vaccines, if needed, too.

Cleaning the Home Safely

If you like, you may make a safe and effective home cleaner using vinegar and baking soda.

- ❖ Mix together ½ cup vinegar, ¼ cup baking soda, and ½ gallon of water.
- ❖ To clean the oven and get rid of toilet stains, try using a baking soda paste mixed with a little water.
- ❖ To clean glass, mirrors, windows, and floors, mix vinegar and a little water together, spray and wipe with a clean cloth.

Best Tips:

- ❖ Accepting help from others may be difficult for you, but if others offer to lend a hand with the cooking and cleaning, accept the offer.
- ❖ Consider hiring a professional cleaning service to take care of some household chores.

This content is a summary of user's tips and suggestions and provided for your general education and information only. It does not necessarily reflect Belong's views and opinions. Belong does not endorse or support any specific product, service, or treatment.