GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR HOT WATER HEATER

Most of us only think about our hot water heaters when they stop working. However, water heating can make up 15-25 percent of a home's energy bill, so using the water heater wisely can save money and energy. More efficient water heating will also contribute to a cleaner environment by reducing air pollution from excessive energy usage.

If you are in the market for a new water heater, look for the Energy Star label. A high-efficiency water heater uses 10-50 percent less energy than its standard counterpart. Compare the energy factor (EF) on models that you are considering; a higher EF means a more efficient heater. Remember, however, that a higher EF may not mean lower annual operating costs if a more expensive fuel is required.

If your water heater has years of life left, try these strategies to reduce heated water consumption:

- Fix drips and leaks. A leak of one drip per second can cost as much as $1 per month.

- Install low-flow faucets and fixtures. A relatively small investment ($10 - $20 for a quality fixture) can yield savings of 5-60 percent.

- Lower your water heating temperature to 120F. Each 10 – degree reduction in temperature can represent a savings of 3 – 5 percent of your energy costs.

- Make sure your hot water heater and pipes are insulated. If the water heater's tank feels warm to the touch, it's needs additional insulation.

- Install a timer that will turn off the water heater at night when hot water is not in demand.

- Use hot water at off-peak times, if possible.

- Use less hot water. Take shorter showers; wash and rinse clothing in cold water.
Many homeowners don't think about replacing their refrigerators until they no longer cool the food inside them. But replacing an older model – even one that works perfectly – can save up anywhere from $50 - $150 per year in energy costs. Because newer models use less power, their environmental impact is smaller – less energy-wasted means less air pollution.

Whether a refrigerator is new or old, homeowners should pay attention to how it is being used to achieve the appliance's peak performance.

- **Position your refrigerator away from heat sources such as ovens, dishwashers or direct sunlight from a window.**

- **Allow air to circulate around the condenser coils by leaving a space between the wall or cabinets and the refrigerator or freezer. Make sure to keep the coils clean.**

- **Ensure that the door seals are airtight.**

- **Keep your refrigerator between 35 and 38 degrees Fahrenheit and your freezer at 0 degrees Fahrenheit or colder.**

- **Open the refrigerator door only when necessary, and keep it open as little time as possible.**

If you are shopping for a new refrigerator, look for an Energy Star model. Energy Star qualified refrigerators employ high efficiency compressors, better insulation and more precise temperature and defrost mechanisms. These refrigerator models consume at least 15 percent less energy than their standard counterparts and 40 percent less energy than a standard model from 2001.

A refrigerator is a large investment, but it may be worth looking in your kitchen to determine whether you're getting the most out of this appliance.

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**HEALTHY HEAD TO TOE:**

**NECK AND SHOULDERS**

A healthy neck and shoulders support your head, keeping it aligned with the rest of the spine in a proper, balanced posture. Though people never bother to take care of their neck and shoulders, they do need care and attention. Some women pay so much attention to their face that they almost forget all about their neck and shoulders and how much they contributes for a beautiful posture. A healthy neck supports your head, keeping it aligned with the rest of the spine in a proper, balanced posture.

The neck has a slight natural curve, which sits on top of the two curves in the middle and lower back. Correct posture maintains all three curves and prevents undue stress and strain by distributing body weight evenly. Good posture means correct use of the body at all times. To prevent problems, one must avoid straining themselves, while lying, sitting, standing, walking, working and exercising. By learning to live with good posture, under all circumstances, you will gradually develop proper carriage and stronger muscles which are needed to protect and support your neck as well as your back.

Your neck and shoulders contain muscles, bones, nerves, arteries and veins, as well as
many ligaments and other supporting structures. Many conditions can cause pain in the neck and shoulder area. Some are life threatening (such as heart attack and major trauma) and others are not so dangerous (such as simple strains or contusions).

Minor injuries that have only slight pain can be treated at home with a combination of rest, heat, ice, elevation and pain control medication. If the source of the pain and the cause of the pain are not known, or if symptoms suggest you might have a more serious condition, you should contact your doctor while initiating basic care measures.

To prevent injuries, examine your home for potential hazards and correct them to reduce the chance of accidental injury. When performing hazardous tasks, have someone present to reduce the likelihood of injury. For example, when climbing a ladder, have someone hold the base of the ladder to keep it from sliding to either side.

Know your limitations. Do not perform activities that you do not have the training skills, tools or strength to accomplish. Finally, wear seat belts and use other safety equipment to reduce injuries.

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**Surface Cleaning, Disinfecting, Hand Hygiene**

A recent National Cleaning Survey, conducted on behalf of the Soap and Detergent Association by International Communications Research, finds that Americans are concerned about reports of skin infections, like *Staphylococcus aureus*, in their children's schools.

If this bacterium becomes resistant to methicillin, a powerful antibiotic commonly used to fight *Staph* infections, recovery from the infection becomes much more difficult. This antibiotic resistant strain is known as MRSA or Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus Aureus*. In the past, nearly all cases of MRSA were found in hospitalized patients, but there is an increasing number of infections acquired outside hospitals and in the community.

**Awareness Alert**

Among the 1,008 American adults who were surveyed, a full 90 percent believe that handwashing can help reduce the spread of a viral flu pandemic and 87 percent believe hand hygiene can be helpful in preventing the spread of a viral disease outbreak such as the avian flu. Seventy-four percent were concerned about ensuring good hand hygiene practices in schools. Separately, 84 percent said they were concerned about ensuring good hygiene practices for themselves and their family members at home.

However, there seems to be a disconnect between what Americans say and what they do. While many viral infection, such as colds, flu and gastrointestinal infections, are spread through person-to-person contact, or contact with contaminated surfaces, this same survey found that 36 percent of Americans seldom or never wash their hands after sneezing.

“Clearly,” observes Nancy Bock, Vice President of Education at The Soap and Detergent Association, “there's a need to put awareness into action.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), good hygiene is critical in preventing *Staph* or skin infections. Keeping hands clean and surfaces disinfected will also help control the spread of flu, colds and other commonly transmitted diseases. Here are a few good hygiene habits to practice:
Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer when you are unable to wash your hands. Sanitizers are not a substitute for proper handwashing.

- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
- Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels or razors.
- Clean surfaces daily with EPA-registered disinfectant according to the manufacturer's directions. Look for the EPA registration number on the product label. Or, use a solution of one tablespoon of bleach mixed in one quart of water to disinfect all non-disposable items and surfaces that may have come in contact with the infected area, wound drainage or soiled supplies.
- Wash soiled linens and clothes with hot water and laundry detergent. Dry them in a hot dryer, if possible.
- Wash utensils and dishes in the dishwasher with dishwasher detergent or by hand using hand dishwashing detergent and hot water.

Wash your hands before handling your toothbrush.

- Keep it to yourself. Don't share your toothbrush with anyone else.
- Rinse it thoroughly after you're done brushing.
- Store upright so it can air-dry. If there's more than one toothbrush in the holder, don't let the bristles come in contact with one another.
- Keep it out in the open. When toothbrushes are covered or stored in closed containers, moisture is trapped, creating a humid environment that is more conducive to bacterial growth than the open air.
- Replace your toothbrush at least every 3-4 months – or sooner if the bristles appear worn or splayed. (this recommendation from the American Dental Association is based on the expected wear of the toothbrush and its subsequent loss of mechanical effectiveness, not on its bacterial contamination.)

**Toothbrush TLC**

_How to clean and care for your toothbrush_

Don't take your toothbrush for granted! Give it the TLC it deserves. Here are some tips, courtesy of Nancy Bock.

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**Spring Closet Cleaning**

_Should You Toss, Sell or Donate?_

For most people, cleaning out their closets ranks right up there with cleaning out the attic, basement or garage. They know it's going to take some time, so they keep putting it off until something major stirs them to action, like a move, death, divorce or other life-changing event. They equate the task with drudgery and simply assume that because they no longer use the items, that the objects must be of little worth.
But, what if I told you that you could be sitting on assets of which you're unaware? That you could, in fact have sequestered in your closet right now a way to pay off some debts, buy some new seasonal clothes, or even send your kid to summer camp? Or at the very least, that you have a way to reduce your 2007 tax bill? What would you think of the task now?

In truth, the best time to go through your unwanted items is when you're NOT being pushed to do so by dire circumstances. When you're under pressure, you tend to turn a blind eye to the possibilities in order to “just get it done.” Calm, cool and collected is always a better approach, because it allows you to think things through a rational, profitable eye:

1. **What To Toss**

You should toss anything in your closet that has permanent stains, irreparable damage or that is worn, threadbare, or falling apart. If you don't wear them to garden, paint, or strip furniture, they need to go. Fast.

Yes, you should keep a few ratty-tatty things around for those household grunge jobs, but unless you do that type of work all the time, you don't need an endless supply. Two pairs of shorts and two t-shirts for warm weather, two sweatshirts and two pairs of long pants for cold weather should see you through.

2. **What To Sell**

Clothing and accessories that are in good condition and that are either less than three years old or more than twenty-five years old are the most sought-after items. Jewelry and furs from all periods tend to sell quickly as well. All prices ranges except discount tend to fare nicely on the resale market, with designer brands the most desirable. Vintage designer apparel is also particularly popular.

Yard sales are an okay way to turn a profit, but why not let someone else do the work for you? Consignment is where a retailer offers your items for sale in their establishment for a percentage of the sale price. Since their goal is to turn over merchandise quickly, they'll only accept items that they know their clientele is likely to want, so don't expect them to take everything you offer (although they might, depending on what you bring in). If an item doesn't sell in a specific time frame, you can either take back the item or direct the store to donate it.

Some consignment shops pay out all commissions at a specific time each month; others hang on to them until you come to claim them. If they're unclaimed for a long period, you may forfeit your money. Check out several stores to see what kind of merchandise they have and whether your stuff would be a good fit. If you find one you like, ask the necessary details, like the commission split, what days and times they accept new consignments and how they pay out. Allow roughly 30 minutes when you go in for them to look over your stuff.

3. **What To Donate**

Once you've tossed your old, unwearable clothes and have set aside the best pieces to sell, you're probably left with a lot of items that aren't current or pristine enough to sell, but that are still in good shape. These are the items you want to donate.

Now before you stuff everything in a plastic bag and drop it off at a donation center, take a few minutes to inventory what you're giving away.
Not only will you be able to arrive at as fair market value of these items for tax purposes, you'll also have an accurate record of what you donated should you ever find yourself face-to-face with an auditor.

So who should get your stuff? Goodwill, Finders Keepers, Catholic Charities and The Salvation Army rank among the most popular recipients. Depending on where you live, they may even offer pick up service.

Also, your local shelters for abused women are always looking for clothes for women and children. Check your phone book or ask someone in the office of a local parish, temple or church for names and groups in your area.

Going through your closet takes time, particularly if you haven't done it in a while. But once you get a system down, you can whip through your closets during the season change twice a year to rid yourself of unwanted items and make money or secure a tax deduction at the same time. All it takes is a little action to get the ball rolling.

So why wait? Get cleaning.

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Eating Seasonally

Seasons form the natural backdrop for eating. All of the world's healthiest foods are seasonal. Imagine a vegetable garden in the dead of winter. Now imagine this same garden on a sunny, summer day. How different things are during these two seasons of the year! For ecologists, seasons are considered a source of natural diversity. Changes in growing conditions from spring to summer or fall to winter are considered essential for balancing the earth's resources and its life forms. But today it's so easy for us to forget about seasons when we eat! Modern food available year – round, and grocery store shelves look much the same in December as they do in July.

What does this mean for you? Eat seasonally! To enjoy the full nourishment of food, you must make your menu a seasonal one. In different parts of the world, and even in different regions of one country, seasonal menus can vary. This spring focus on tender, fruits and vegetables that represent the fresh new growth of this season. The greening that occurs in springtime should be represented by leafy greens, peas and berries on your plate.

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Spotlight for April
by Robin Taylor

Buy Fresh, Buy Local

When choosing fruits and vegetables always look for produce that is closest to it's most natural form. The less processed the food, the better. This is one of the many reasons I suggest visiting your local farmers market. It's a great place to purchase fresh, healthy food directly from the farmer or grower. Onslow County Farmers Market is opening for the 2007 market season on April 21st, and it's a perfect time for you to come out and enjoy the best that nature and your local farmers have to offer.

The benefits of shopping locally at the farmers market are numerous. First the market is filled with food that's good for you, brightly colored fruits and vegetables that change with the season. Enjoy corn on the cob, tomatoes and berries in the summer, or squash, sweet potatoes and collards in fall.
The majority of the produce in supermarkets was picked almost a week before it hits the shelves and traveled many, many miles before being sold. When you shop at the farmers market you can be assured that the food you purchase is fresh, hasn't traveled long distances and undergone lots of packaging.

When you buy locally at a farmers market, you're doing your part in reducing the energy consumption needed to support large-scale food systems. You're also helping to put money directly into the pockets of local farmers who don't or can't produce supermarket quantities. And you're buying recently harvested produce – cutting down the time between the harvest and consumption means more nutrients are preserved.

Finally, the farmers market offers great opportunities to try something new. Onslow County farmers and growers are there because they have a passion for their product. They're a wealth of information. Don't be afraid to ask questions, as this can be a great chance to get new ideas and tips for food preparation.

Not only will you experience the health benefits of eating locally, but also you'll have some fun and may well learn something new in the process.

The Onslow County Farmers Market (located at 4024 Richlands Hwy, Jacksonville, NC 28540) 2007 Season begins Saturday, April 21st. The Market is open Tuesdays and Saturdays from 9am until 3pm.

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