

10 steps for easy furnace maintenance

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With the winter season fast approaching, now is the time to consider a furnace tune-up. This important home appliance needs to be fully functional in the cold season. Any dust build-up or debris can cause your furnace to lose efficiency or cause malfunction or, in the worse case, can cause a fire.

City Air Conditioning and Heating suggests the following for safe and easy furnace maintenance:

1. Always turn off the electricity breaker on your service panel

When working with any electrical appliance, you'll want to avoid electrical shock or any other potentially dangerous outcomes. Be sure to always work with a licensed professional when working with electrical systems.

2. Turn off the gas line that enters your house

A black line leading into the furnace will have a valve on it, turn it so that it is lined up with the gas line.

3. Vacuum the furnace interior

A shop vac and an old paint brush can remove dirt and debris. The base of the heater and the burners are where you should focus on a thorough cleaning.

4. Change the air filter

This is more important than you may think. If the filter is not clean you will be blowing all of the dirt and debris back into the air ducts. Replace monthly or choose a permanent filter.

5. Check the fan belt

Check to make sure the fan belt is in good condition and tight. A good indication of a bad or worn belt is glazing, cracking or fraying.

6. Lubricate oil bearings

You can do this simply by locating the oil caps, usually found on the bearing shaft. Make sure that you do not oil in excess. This could lead to future problems.

7. Reconnect everything you disassembled

Before turning the electricity back on make sure you have replaced everything you had removed.

8. Relight the burners if needed

If you have a push button style igniter, replace the cover before you relight and start it again.

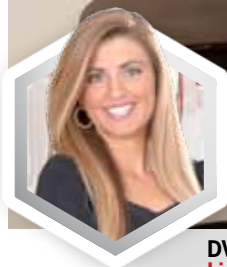
9. Replace the furnace cover

As an important safety precaution never leave the furnace uncovered.

10. Check your carbon monoxide sensor

There should be a CO sensor in every home for added safety for your family. Carbon monoxide is a gas that you can't see, smell or taste, that can cause sudden illness and death.

For more home renovation and maintenance articles and a comprehensive local business directory, please visit Let's Renovate by EiEi Home at letsrenovate.torontosun.com



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PHOTOS STEPHANIE BUCHMAN

Back to basics: Kitchen trends

Your kitchen is the hub of your home. So, to assure your hub is functioning with maximum efficiency, make sure you have your kitchen basics covered and that you're taking advantage of the hottest trends.

When designing kitchens on HGTV's *Income Property* and for my own clients, I incorporate the basics for functionality and splurge on areas that not only maximize efficiency, but also add investment to the home.

Opt for professional appliances

Appliances are the workhorse in the kitchen so if your budget allows, splurge on professional appliances, which are all the rage. Paneled or stainless steel are still the most popular choice for appliances and what homebuyers look for most often when investing in a new home. Bear in mind, most refrigerators last approximately 10 to 15 years before needing replacing but an oven and stovetop lasts much longer.

Double islands

If your kitchen is large enough, why not consider adding double islands? Double islands are the latest trend — more counter space, more work space, more seating! While one-island houses the sink and workspace, the other island creates a divider between the kitchen

and the living room. Double islands provide a workable solution for kitchens with more than one cook, or for separating certain foods in kosher kitchens.

Double bowl sinks

For some, double bowl sinks (a rectangular sink with two side-by-side bowls or basins) are essential for prep and cleanup. Bowls may be the same size, or one larger and one smaller. A double-bowled sink is ideal for multi-tasking, multiple cooks and washing and rinsing dishes; however, it does take up more counter space, making it less than ideal for small kitchens.

Lots of storage

Whether I am designing a small or large kitchen storage is key for creating a functional and efficient space. At my firm we've completed many kitchen remodels, and while the spotlight is always placed on gorgeous cabinets, appliances, countertops and décor— as it should be — we also work hard to find the hottest storage solutions to maximize efficiency. Pull-out storage is a must for busy kitchens. Frequent entertainers might consider tucking pull-out storage into the base of the kitchen island to house large platters. Today, a waste-recycling centre is essential for keeping recyclable materials out

of sight, and a walk-in kitchen pantry provides the ultimate storage — if you have the room. However, even if you don't have the room, consider a pantry system that unfolds within a cabinet for quick and easy storage (*see more on these clever solutions on page 11*)

Before you begin remodeling your kitchen, consider your budget and needs, and, hire a professional designer to work within your parameters.

Tips:

- Consider a speed oven in lieu of a microwave. A speed oven is smaller than a standard wall oven, but combines convection, microwave, and often, a grill element—speeding up cooking time considerably.
- Enhance the hardware of a basic kitchen by playing with the hardware and adding multiply choices. Don't be afraid to mix three to four different pulls and knobs, provided they relate to one another. When budget dictates, choose simple, less expensive doors and embellish them with quality hardware.

Toronto-based celebrity and award-winning designer Dvira Ovadia, principal of Dvira Interiors, is known for her appearances and design work on various HGTV programs. Dvira and her team use their profound understanding of design to create stylishly smart spaces, servicing clientele throughout Ontario. Visit [@DVIRAdesigner](http://dvira.com)