

Does your home need a health check?

Chloe Bullock and Jecks Stone design homes for good health while avoiding animal products and chemicals, and you can too...

Jecks and I met when we took the Vegan Design course and have continued to share our learnings since. As the pandemic goes on, we are spending lots more time inside, so we wanted to help you make that a more healthy experience. The following things to watch out for in your home are broken down into the human-centric design standard 'WELL Building Standard's' concepts.

AIR: THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD VENTILATION

With lots of us now living and working in the same room for extended periods of time, the quality of the air in those spaces could be having a significant impact on our lives. "The average person spends almost 90% of their time indoors where air quality can be 2-5 times worse than outdoor air quality", says The WELL Building Standard.

Try to use background ventilation like trickle vents, extractor fans or, even better, mechanical ventilation if you can, to reduce damp and condensation.

Poor indoor air quality can trigger or exacerbate asthma and other respiratory conditions and cardiovascular conditions. There are health concerns around chemical use, such as stain resistance, fire treatments, some paints, and formaldehyde in products, in our increasingly air-tight spaces. The 'new' smell of carpets and furniture indicates offgassing. Offgasses can take several days to disperse, so it's worth increasing ventilation during that time and limiting access to the room where possible.

Daily habits, like cooking methods, can also increase the levels of formaldehyde in your home. The International Food

Information Council's annual survey has recorded the change in cooking habits during the pandemic, with 60% cooking more frequently. With more frequent cooking, be mindful of the consequences of the activity on your indoor air quality. Formaldehyde has a natural presence in some food, in varying amounts, but is also produced by overcooking or burning food. It's soluble in water though, so wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly. For dried foods like shiitake mushrooms, soak thoroughly, discarding the water before cooking at correct temperatures.

Chemicals amount to a large percentage of the weight of most fabrics. We recommend watching the film *Stink* to find out more about the effects on humans and air quality. Look out for regulated Green Labels, such as Oeko-tex and GOTS certified fabrics, which are monitored for safe chemical use. The cleaning and maintenance of fabrics also reintroduces chemicals into your environment. Dry cleaning and shampooing carpets can impact on air quality, avoided by careful consideration before making a purchase or finding eco-friendly cleaning companies.

Air purifying pot plants, such as snake plants and peace lilies, are a beneficial element to have in many areas of your home. Some plants are good in bedrooms, cleaning the air at night while you sleep by providing fresh oxygen. These plants can also be handy in spaces where you take naps. Seek advice on which plants are suitable as well as safe to be used around pets.

There's also carbon dioxide absorbing paint. This non-petrochemical graphene-based paint claims that 45 litres will absorb over 14kg of carbon dioxide, as

much as a mature tree absorbs in 12 months. If using regular paints, look for very low volatile organic compounds (VOC) content and select water-based instead of oil-based options.

LIGHT

Try to maximise your exposure to daylight at a regular time in the morning. It will help your circadian rhythm (your sleep/wake cycle) by tuning your body clock into the day and regulating it – aiding many health benefits including cognitive function, stress levels and ability to sleep well.

How is the lighting in your home? If you are working from home, it's good to add task lighting to your work areas. Don't rely solely on a room's main light. Ceiling pendants in the centre of the room can cast your work area in your shadow, causing eye strain and lowering concentration levels. Use lamps you

Above With so many of us working from home now, it's important to seek out daylight exposure.

Top Get outside every day if you can and take regular breaks to walk about.

Right Plants can make a big difference to the quality of the air in your home.



"Try to maximise your exposure to daylight at a regular time in the morning"



already have at home rather than buying new. An adjustable lamp will allow you to direct light according to your needs. If you share your work space with someone else, they can position light according to their needs.

Try also to optimise daylight. It's a good design choice to combine blinds and curtains to control natural light throughout the day, as well as the influx of heat during warmer seasons. They also block out artificial light from outdoors during the night. Couple this with opening windows a few of times a day to circulate fresh air, remembering to keep openings clean to lessen particles filtering into your home.

Using lamps or dimmable light during the evening gives you more

control over lighting levels that can help you wind down before bed. Warm light is ideal. Try winding down in a candlelit room, drawing on the added benefits of soothing essential oils (use vegan waxes like soy or rapeseed) to ease physical and mental stresses and put you in a relaxed state ready for sleep.

MIND

If working from home, position yourself near to a window you can see out of. Hopefully it gives you the feeling of space and there's greenery in your view. It will do you good! Biophilia – meaning a connection to nature that humans crave – is hugely beneficial to us. Biophilia includes animals, water, natural textures –

Right Spend a little time setting up the best workstation for light, air and posture.

stones, timber as well as plants. The benefits include reduced blood pressure, depression and anxiety; increased attention capacity; speeds up healing times; increased psychological wellbeing; and increased pain tolerance.

Plants are well worth integrating into your home. If possible, make use of window sills and outside ledges as it blurs the boundaries of outdoors and indoors and adds organic visual interest to windows. Create a mix of plants, flowers or herbs that you can care for as the activity of gardening is like exercise for your mental health.

COMFORT

How comfortable is your home workspace? Using your dining table is better than working on your lap from the sofa as it compromises your posture. Dining tables are usually higher than desks, so use cushions, or invest in an inflatable seat cushion to raise yourself higher while still supporting your body – your forearms should be parallel with the table top and 90 degrees to your upper arms. Your eyes should be level with the top half of the screen, so prop it up on books and, if using a laptop, get a separate keyboard and mouse and use the laptop as a screen.

When working at home for long lengths of time, buy or borrow a good quality task chair, with lumbar support ideally. Your employer actually still has obligations to ensure your home workstation is sustainable, so if you are experiencing discomfort let them know you need a display screen equipment (DSE) assessment.

Vary your working position. Can you



Right Make sure that you stay properly hydrated throughout the day.

stand for some reading tasks, perhaps at the kitchen counter? If you're working in a multi-functional room, can you section an area off to create some privacy and sound improvement? A freestanding open-backed bookcase makes a really good room divider and offers somewhere to put those health beneficial plants.

WATER

Being dehydrated has implications on your nervous system. This can affect your mood and brain function, so ensure you drink enough water throughout the day. Keep tally on your smart device or in your diary to monitor how much you consume. The WELL Building Standard recommends the Institute of Medicine daily guideline of 2.7 to 3.7 litres of water (through a combination of beverages and food). If you need to improve the taste of the water, install a water filter on your drinking water tap, or filter it using a jug or bottle rather than relying on bottled water.

Throughout the day, add lemon water for a nice boost of vitamin C. Try a combination of warm water and lemon in the morning and later in the day cold water and lemon. The differing temperatures have different benefits.

We hope this guide has given you some actionable tips to help optimise your health at home. ♥



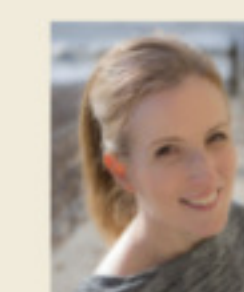
FITNESS ▲

Aim to get outside each day, preferably in nature. If you're working, get up and walk about once an hour. Download an app to give you a nudge to do stretches or take a 10 minute break to do some yoga.



JECKS STONE
Jecks is a trained interior designer creating home

environments beneficial to health and wellbeing. Her background in recycling management and historic building conservation marry interiors with architecture and environmental impact. After wrestling with balancing morals with the built environments, she became one of the first UK designers to be vegandesign.org certified™. Her company, Persona Abode, commits to sustainability and wellbeing, mindful of designing for people, place and planet, using WELL Building Standards. Jecks supports companies with aligning ethical standpoints to help communities affected by hardship. www.persona-abodeinteriors.com, [instagram.com/personaabode](https://www.instagram.com/personaabode)



CHLOE BULLOCK
Chloe Bullock is a BIID registered Interior

Designer® at the British Institute of Interior Design – the pre-eminent professional organisation for interior designers in the UK. She creates animal-friendly, human-friendly and planet-friendly interiors. She was the first interior designer in the UK to be vegandesign.org certified™. Chloe supports both entrepreneurs and home owners, designing with a focus on sustainability, health and cruelty-free specifications. She is a FitWel® Ambassador and keen follower of human-centric, healthy design, to ensure spaces are healthy for the users. www.materialiseinteriors.com, [instagram.com/materialiseint](https://www.instagram.com/materialiseint)