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Victoria Prentice-Funk

### Spring Cleaning!

With spring just around the corner, spring cleaning is probably at the top of your list to do! But who came up with spring cleaning and why do we do it? In this short article I'll explore the history of spring cleaning and the associated health benefits of it.

Spring cleaning is defined as the practice of thoroughly cleaning a house in the springtime. It's almost an annual ritual here in Canada. After the long, dark winter comes to an end and the sun starts to stick around a little longer each day, many people feel the urge to spring into action! The practice of deep cleaning one's home is actually found in a few different cultures and religions and can be traced back hundreds of years in Jewish, Iranian and Chinese cultures.

In Iran, the ritual, which is done sometime in the two weeks preceding Nowruz, is called khane tekani ("shaking the house"), and the custom lives up to its name (*Nowruz: Celebrating the New Year on the Silk Roads | Silk Roads Programme, n.d.*)! Every bit of a home is scoured and cleaned; nothing is spared. Rugs, drapes, bedding, knick-knacks, floors, ceilings, everything gets a good cleaning. Fresh flowers are brought in to renew the house's vibrancy. Once the house is shaken, the new year, and spring, can arrive.

In Jewish custom, Passover (Pesach) is a time of house cleaning as well (*Are You Spring Cleaning or Passover Cleaning? | HuffPost Communities, n.d.*). Jewish people adopted unleavened bread as a symbolic reminder of the subjugation they overcame (Editors, n.d.). It's a humble bread, and during Passover, keeping leavened bread (chametz), which is any bread made with yeast, is considered a no-no. Even crumbs can get you in trouble! So, to avoid this as well as make their kitchens kosher, Jewish people deep clean their homes



514-332-4320



bureau@aseq-ehaq.ca  
office@aseq-ehaq.ca



before Passover (*Are You Spring Cleaning or Passover Cleaning?* | *HuffPost Communities*, n.d.). Given Passover comes around April, many people consider this custom as the origin of spring cleaning.

Finally there's the Chinese custom, like Iranians, the Chinese clean their homes in anticipation of the new year, which occurs sometime at the end of January or beginning of February given the lunar calendar (*Lunar New Year*, n.d.). Spring cleaning is a big part of the lunar new year rituals. The Chinese sweep their floors and clean their homes to get rid of bad luck and misfortune that may have accumulated during the previous year (*Lunar New Year*, n.d.). Once the house is a clean slate, the Chinese welcome the new year and its good fortune by observing a prohibition against sweeping for the first few days of the new year in order to prevent sweeping away any good fortune that came with the turn of the year (*Why Do We Traditionally Clean Our Homes At the Beginning of Spring?*, 2009). Given cleaning away the "old" and cleaning the slate is such a big part of celebrating the start of a new year in Chinese culture, many consider this to be the origin of spring cleaning.

Whatever the origin of spring cleaning, the practice seems to have spread through the masses and become a universal tradition. Other than cultural or religious reasons why do we keep doing it?

Well, there's actually a lot of unexpected health benefits to spring cleaning! For one thing, it's a proven de-stresser. More mess means more stress, so it's not surprising that one study found that housework cuts stress and anxiety by 20% (*Cleaning "Improves Mental Health,"* 2008). Furthermore, another study found that the smell of lemons helps destress you even faster, in the study the smell of lemons was associated with better moods, happier and more positive attitudes! Interesting stuff! Another benefit to spring cleaning, is it helps you breathe better. Many of us assume our allergies or asthma act up strictly because of the change of seasons but the pile up of pet dander, dust and dirt inside our homes over the winter months might have more to do with it than what's going on outside. Keeping a clean home also improves your mood, one study found that women who live in less cluttered and generally "cleaner" homes were less fatigued after work and had less dips in mood over the course of their day (Saxbe & Repetti, 2010). A cleaner



environment also boosts productivity and focus. Keeping a clean home also helps prevent injuries. Having your little ones clean up after themselves prevents the pain of stepping on a piece of Lego. And keeping walkways clear, helps prevent falls which the national council of ageing says 1 in 4 adults will take each year (*6 Steps to Help Prevent Falls in Older Adults*, n.d.). The biggest reason to spring clean is that cleaning annually can prevent illness. Doing a deep clean, means you're cleaning things you don't normally clean and thus you're getting rid of any hidden germs or moulds around your house. For example, it means, you're finally cleaning out all the old crumbs in your toaster and sanitising your washing machine, cleaning out your dishwasher filter and the back of your fridge of old or expired food. Resulting in less exposure to harmful moulds, spores and germs and thus less sicknesses!

The benefits are endless, so what are you waiting for? Spring into action and let's get cleaning!

If you need any tips or tricks on cleaning your home in a non-toxic or chemical-free way, check out our [Eco-Living Guide](#).

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