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Clearing Clogged Drains

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By Annie B. Bond, author of *Better Basics for the Home* (Three Rivers, 1999).

My upstairs bathroom sink drain always needs attention: I think toothpaste is the culprit, but whatever, it always needs help.

You don't need powerful industrial chemicals as the household cleaning industry would have you believe! Find out the surprisingly easy and non-toxic way I keep that drain open.

SIMPLE SOLUTION: When our drains get clogged, we have been unwaveringly convinced that nothing short of the most powerful chemical arsenal will work. As a result, most of us resort to commercial drain cleaners that are some of the most dangerous chemicals found in the home. Lye or acid, these products can harm health, the wastewater stream, and PVC pipes.

A gentle yet effective approach to coaxing free a clog from a drain is to use simple household ingredients instead of burning a hole through the clog with industrial lye or acid. There are even bacteria-based enzyme cleaners available in health food stores that eat the clog free from the pipe without harming everything else in which it comes into contact. And it is always worth it to try unclogging a drain first with an old-fashioned plunger; they very often do the trick. If all else fails, you might try an electric plumber's snake, but it is recommended that to prevent injury, only professional plumbers should use this equipment.

Baking Soda Drain Cleaner

If water hasn't yet backed up in your drain, pour 1 cup of baking soda followed by 3 cups of boiling water. The boiling water will change the chemical composition of baking soda, making it more alkaline. Repeat a few times until the drain is clear.

Washing Soda Drain Cleaner

If the water isn't going down the drain, pour a cup of washing soda over the drain area and let it set for a while to work its way down to the clog. Once the clog is loosened, use the baking soda method, above. Washing soda is more alkaline than baking soda, with a pH of 11. You never want to use washing soda if a commercial acid drain cleaner has recently been used in the drain, as they will strongly react with each other. You also shouldn't overuse washing soda if you have PVC pipes, as the caustic nature of washing soda can slowly damage the plastic.

The Bubbling Method Using Vinegar and Baking Soda

Baking soda and vinegar react with each other to cause bubbles and fizzing. Sometimes the fizzing can unlodge clogs. Follow the baking soda and boiling water formula, above, with 1 cup of vinegar.

Enzyme Drain and Garbage Disposal Maintenance

All natural living enzyme culture drain cleaners will actually eat and break down any organic matter. Using enzyme drain cleaners once a month, such as Bi-O-Kleen's Bacout, will help not just your drains, but your septic system. They will also significantly reduce odor from garbage disposals. Colonies of enzymes will actually continue to grow and break down organic matter in your drains.

Washing Soda Maintenance

Enzymes don't work as well on hair clogs, so to keep drains clear that tend to collect hair, such as in the shower and bath, a few times a month pour 1 cup of washing soda followed by a thorough flushing of water.

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Wendy Mcleannan

Monday October 15, 2007, 2:21 PM

Des this work on drains that are plugged with hair?



Wendy Mcleannan

Monday October 15, 2007, 2:20 PM

Our bathtub is plugged, due to hair I think. Will these solutions work on hair plugs or making some vinegar to unclog each side of my kitchen sink yesterday (9/26). However, I didn't use boiling water, but vinegar instead.



Tammy aka Laughing Leaf

Thursday September 27, 2007, 10:23 AM
 Tuesday September 18, 2007, 6:32 PM

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☐ No.
☐ Unsure.

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