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20 Easy Fix-Its [Family Circle Archive]

Family Circle Articles

20 Easy Fix-Its: For Everyday Household Problems

By Al Ubell & Label Shulman

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Before you call the plumber, carpenter or electrician, consult our handy pull-out fix-it chart. Doing these easy repair jobs yourself will save you time and money I too.

- **Kitchen Repair**
- **Bathroom Repair**
- **Basement Repair**
- **Living Spaces (frequent repairs)**



Note: FREE Download! Expert **Tool Tutorials**. Get the online book version from, **Recipes for Home Repair**, coauthored by Alvin Ubell and Sam Bittman. Learn how-to use specific tools for common home repair jobs.

Kitchen Repair Tips

Kitchen Problem	Materials & Tools	How To Repair It
Loose plastic laminate on countertop.	Rubbing alcohol, slow-curing epoxy, masking tape.	Clean area under laminate with a generous amount of rubbing alcohol soaked into a cloth. While area dries, mix slow-curing epoxy, according to instructions. Apply epoxy to area between laminate and countertop; then press. Secure with masking tape or heavy books. Alter two hours, scrape off excess epoxy with a sharp blade. Let dry overnight.
Loose cabinet door hinges.	Wooden toothpicks, white polyvinyl glue, screwdriver (either a Phillips or slot head) as required.	If screws turn without tightening the hinges, the screw holes are probably worn down. To fix, remove loose screws and set them aside. Dip the ends of several toothpicks into the glue, then fill the screw hole with as many toothpicks as possible. Break off the protruding ends and allow glued toothpick pieces to dry for a few hours. Replace screws; they should fit tightly now.
Refrigerator runs continuously and does not keep food at the proper temperature.	Vacuum cleaner, long brush with soft bristles.	The condenser coils are probably dirty. Unplug refrigerator, then locate condenser coils. (They are either located at the back or on the bottom of the refrigerator.) Loosen all dust and dirt on the coils with the brush, then vacuum to

Kitchen Problem

Materials & Tools How To Repair It

Reduced water pressure on kitchen sink (hot or cold).	Slip-joint pliers, small toothbrush.	remove any remaining debris. Most likely, the aerator/filter on end of faucet is clogged and needs to be cleaned. Gently grasp with pliers and unscrew it. (Note the order of the aerator non-washers, strainers, etc.). Clean all parts with plain water and toothbrush. Reassemble aerator and replace on faucet end. Gently tighten with pliers.
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Bathroom Repair Tips

Bathroom Problem

Materials & Tools How To Repair It

Water runs continuously in toilet flush tank.	Scouring powder, steel wool.	Water level needs adjusting. Do this by bending the float rod so that it comes no higher than the top of the overflow tube. If water still overflows the tube, repeat the procedure, bending the rod slightly more until the water level is adjusted. If this adjustment is made and water continues to flow into bowl, the problem may be due to improper alignment of the stopper valve (located at the bottom of the tank). Realign stopper valve by moving it into proper position with your hands; then clean the bottom of the valve with steel wool and scouring powder.
Toilet flush lever does not work.	No tools necessary.	The stopper-valve lifting device (yours may be a chain or a rod) may be disconnected. Open flush tank and reconnect chain link or rod hook.
Clogged toilet bowl.	Large kettle or pot, powdered laundry detergent (NOTE: Do not use automatic dishwashing detergent), liquid bleach, toilet bowl plunger (ball type), Petroleum jelly.	Fill large kettle or pot with hot tap water and pour into toilet bowl. Pour a cup of liquid bleach and a cup of laundry detergent into the bowl, then pour boiling water into bowl. The chemical reaction between ingredients may dissolve the blockage. If blockage persists, you will need the plunger. Smear petroleum jelly around the bottom lip of the plunger. Place plunger into the bottom of the toilet bowl and press down slowly but firmly. Now pull the plunger up quickly to create a suction action. Repeat until blockage is cleared.
Low water pressure in shower.	Masking or adhesive tape, slip-joint pliers or wrench, Teflon ® dope tape, replacement shower head (if necessary), vinegar, hairpin or straight pin.	Shower head may be blocked with dirt or mineral deposits. To repair, wrap masking or adhesive tape around shower head coupling (where it connects to the pipe). Using pliers or wrench, unscrew the shower head and examine it for blockage. Clean out debris, using a hairpin or straight pin. If buildup of mineral or lime deposit is evident (white, powder-like substance), soak shower head in vinegar for 24 hours. Scrape away loose deposits. If above steps fail, you'll need to buy a new shower head. Wrap exposed threads of shower head with dope tape. Attach shower head. Test for leakage.
Loose wall, shower or tub tile.	Rubbing alcohol, rags, silicone caulk (tub caulk scraper), hairdryer, round toothpicks.	Carefully remove tiles by hand. Scrape off old grout from the sides and backs of tiles and clean wall cavity, drying thoroughly with the hairdryer. Wipe all tile and wall cavity surfaces with a rag soaked in rubbing alcohol and allow area to dry. Squeeze some silicone caulk on the block of the tile-enough to fill cavity gaps and keep tile surface flush with surrounding tiles. Press tile into cavity. Insert toothpicks (2 per side) around tile to maintain equal spacing while silicone sets. Do not disturb or use shower for 24 hours. The next day, squeeze a small

Bathroom

Problem	Materials & Tools	How To Repair It
		bead of caulk into all corners surrounding the tile. Wipe clean with on alcohol-soaked rag and allow to dry for at least another 12 hours.

Basement Repair Tips

Basement

Problem	Materials & Tools	How To Repair It
Sweating cold-water pipes.	Ruler, pipe insulating kit (available at hardware store or home center), scissors.	Your pipes need to be insulated, which can be done simply with a pipe insulating kit. Measure the diameter (width) and length of the sweaty pipes. Wrap the pipes with insulation according to manufacturer's instructions. NOTE: This repair is also effective as an energy-saving measure on hot-water pipes. The materials used can be deducted as an energy tax credit.
Water pipe pinhole leak.	Round wooden toothpicks, slow-curing epoxy, small piece of cardboard, mixing stick, rags or paper towels.	Push a toothpick into the pinhole so it fits as tightly as possible. Do not touch the toothpick for about 10 minutes, allowing it to swell. Wipe pipe dry around toothpick area. Break off toothpick about 1/4" from pipe surface. Mix a generous amount of epoxy as per instructions, using cardboard as a palette. Tear several long strips of rag, about 2" wide. Smear epoxy around entire pipe extending about 2" on either side of leak. Wrap the strips of cloth around pipe, generously applying epoxy glue with each turn of the cloth. Allow epoxy to dry.
Drafts.	Silicone or butyl rubber caulk, caulking gun, thin screwdriver.	Locate draft spots and fill in with caulk compound. Insert tube of caulk (as per instructions) into caulking gun. Cut off the tip of caulking cartridge to a 45° angle to allow a small bead of caulk to emerge as you squeeze the trigger. Using a thin screwdriver, insert into tip of cartridge and puncture inside seal. Fill gaps around loose or drafty windows with caulk, working the point of the cartridge around the frame in a continuous motion. Do the same to all cracks around hose pipes and electric wiring entry points to the house, as well as around lowest row of shingles at foundation and under door sills. Caulk should also be squeezed under the inside wood sill, which rests on the foundation.

Living Spaces Repair Tips

Maintenance

Problem	Materials & Tools	How To Repair It
Squeaky wood floors and stairs.	Talcum powder, flat wide chisel, hammer, whisk broom, dustpan.	Locate area of flooring that squeaks and sprinkle a generous amount of talcum powder on surface. Place chisel between boards in the squeaky area. Gently tap the chisel with the hammer to pry the seams of the floorboards. Brush talcum powder into the open cracks with the whisk broom. Sweep up any excess talcum powder. DO NOT USE A VACUUM CLEANER: This will remove the powder from the cracks. If squeak persists, repeat procedure in a week.
Loose floor tiles.	Rags, floor tile paste or mastic glue (available at hardware stores), rubbing alcohol, spackle knife.	Lift off loose tiles and clean both the tiles and floor space thoroughly with a rag soaked in rubbing alcohol. With a spackle knife, spread a thin layer of paste or mastic on the back of tile. Replace tile, carefully matching any existing design. Press and wipe up any excess paste with rag.

Maintenance

Problem Materials & Tools How To Repair It

Small hole or tear in mesh window screening.	Clear nail polish, ice pick or other pointed tool.	Straighten out any bent pieces of screen mesh with ice pick or other pointed tool, then dab a small amount of nail polish on the hole and surrounding area. Allow area to dry and repeat nail polish application until hole or tear is completely sealed.
Sticking windows.	Paraffin wax, candle or silicone spray.	Open windows to expose side tracks (window guides). Rub the wax, or spray silicone into the tracks on both sides of the window. Move window up and down several times to work the wax or silicone lubricant into the frame. Repeat procedure if windows continue to stick. CAUTION: Do not use oil or grease. This attracts dirt and becomes gritty.
Keeping glass panes clean while painting.	Newspaper, scissor, spray bottle with water.	Cut newspaper to fit inside panes of window to be painted. Spray each window pane with water, then stick fitted newspaper to glass. Point frames immediately, before water-soaked paper dries. Paper will come off easily when dry. Window panes will be clean and free of paint.
Loose or missing putty around window.	Putty or can of glazing compound, putty knife, linseed oil, small paintbrush, cornstarch.	Remove old, loose putty with a putty knife and clean all residue and dirt from pane areas. Brush a coating of linseed oil into corners where putty has been removed. Rub some cornstarch onto your hands to keep putty from sticking, then roll putty into a long rope. Squeeze this into the corners. Dip putty knife into boiled linseed oil and smooth putty in each corner at about a 45° angle. Repeat process until putty is smooth. Remove excess putty with knife.
Flickering fluorescent light.	Starter and/or bulb.	Either the starter on the fixture needs replacing or you need a new bulb. First, turn off light. Locate fluorescent fixture starter at one end of fixture. Remove starter from fixture and insert new starter. (NOTE: Many newer fixtures have no starters, so disregard this step if yours is new.) If replacement of starter does not correct problem, a new fluorescent bulb is probably necessary. Locate bulb with blackened or darkened end. Remove bulb by either twisting or pushing the bulb toward the spring-loaded socket. Replace with a new bulb of same wattage and length. If light fixture still flickers, a licensed electrician will be needed to replace transformer.
Loose table leg.	Adjustable wrench, wooden toothpicks, white polyvinyl glue.	Turn table upside down on a rug or towel to protect the surface. Tighten the bolts in each corner with the wrench. If leg bolt continues to turn without tightening, remove the bolt from the table frame. Squeeze glue into bolt hole (not into hole in the leg) and push some toothpicks into the glued bolt hole. Allow glue to dry, then reinsert bolt and tighten.

