

# help wanted



## bad little habits that **cost big bucks**

It pays—literally!—to quit these around-the-house don'ts.

### **THE HABIT:**

**yanking the cord to unplug the vacuum**

**WHY IT'S BAD:** Repeatedly tugging the vacuum cord instead of bending down and pulling the plug out of the socket could cause a whole host of damage: The cord could split open, a wire inside could break, the plug could bend out of whack, or you could even crack the outlet itself—which can all lead to pricey repairs.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHRIS LONG WRITTEN BY SARAH GROSSBART



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**THE HABIT:**  
**SLAMMING  
THE  
MICROWAVE  
DOOR**

**WHY IT'S BAD:** Inside most microwave doors is a set of switches that must close in the proper order. When the door is shoved shut, that sequence could change, which can blow the microwave's main fuse. You also risk cracking the plastic switches that hold the door in place. Either way, it can damage your appliance.

**THE HABIT:** **running  
the dishwasher  
half-empty**

**WHY IT'S BAD:** Your machine uses the same amount of water and electricity no matter how many dishes are inside, so two half loads require double the water and electricity of a single full one. If you're desperate to get a small load clean, just wash those dishes by hand—but limit wastefulness by turning off the tap while you're soaping everything up.

**THE HABIT:** **ALWAYS WASHING  
CLOTHES IN HOT WATER**

**WHY IT'S BAD:** Only whites, on occasion, and your dirtiest loads, like oil-splattered clothes, require a high-temp setting. For all others, including bloodstained items, cold water will do the trick. And because most of the electricity your washer uses goes toward heating the water, you can save up to 50 cents a load if you set the dial to "colors" or the cold water setting. At four loads a week, that's \$104 a year!



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### THE HABIT: FLUSHING CLEANING WIPES

**WHY IT'S BAD:** Toilet tissue breaks down quickly, but baby wipes and household cleaning wipes are often made of woven fibers that are more likely to maintain their composition in drainage systems. Even some "flushable" wipes can cause clogs. That could lead to blockages in your home's drain lines or, if your neighbors are doing the same, affect your entire municipality's sewage system.

### THE HABIT: letting food drip onto the bottom of the oven

**WHY IT'S BAD:** The next time you turn on the heat, those grease splatters and crumbs could cause your oven to smoke, which can lead to funky-tasting food, bad odors, or a discolored interior. They can even lead to oven fires. To be safe—and extend the life of your appliance—wipe up spills within a few hours (once the oven cools) and clean the interior three to four times a year, either by hand or using the self-cleaning cycle.

### THE HABIT: LEAVING THE CABLE BOX PLUGGED IN

**WHY IT'S BAD:** Experts say two cable-and-DVR sets can gobble up more electricity each year than a new fridge. So if you have boxes on little-used TVs or are heading out of town for a while and don't need your DVR, turn them off completely. FYI: That means you'll need to actually pull the plug. If the box is lit up in any way—if the clock is on, for example—it's still running at near-full power, even if you pressed the off button.

### THE HABIT: OVERFILLING THE REFRIGERATOR

**WHY IT'S BAD:** A fridge functions at its best when it's about three-quarters full. When shelves are stuffed to the brim—or if items are blocking the vents in the top of the refrigerator where the cold air is released—it can lead to poor circulation. Translation: Your food will spoil faster.





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**THE HABIT:** jam-packing  
the blender

**WHY IT'S BAD:** Overfilling can not only tax the motor but also cause the blender to leak or overheat and shut off. Once that happens, you may need to splurge on a replacement or a costly repair. So how much can you stuff in there? Check your blender's manual to be sure, and when tossing in ingredients, add liquids first, then solids, then frozen foods—that's easiest on the appliance.

**THE HABIT:** NOT  
TIGHTENING THE  
CAR'S GAS CAP  
UNTIL IT CLICKS

**WHY IT'S BAD:** This could cost you and the environment, since a loose cap can release harmful vapors into the atmosphere. If you do forget to click, most newer cars alert you by illuminating the check-engine light. But if you're not sure what the problem is, that could send you scrambling to see a mechanic.

**+** Tap to see our panel of experts.