

I Got an Air Purifier and It Literally Changed My Life

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For four years, I lived on 58th street in Manhattan. My apartment was basically on the Queensborough Bridge, right where cars enter and exit. I know what you're thinking—"How loud was that?"—and you'd have a point. In all honesty, it was pretty noisy. But as it would turn out, that was only the most obvious problem, not the most important one.

I turned my A/C to the "fan" setting each night to cover up the noise and kept my double windows closed pretty much at all times. While it was annoying, I didn't really mind, since leaving them open meant that, within a day, the glass itself, the windowsill, and everything around it would be covered in black dirt. We're not talking about your normal dust—this was straight soot and pollution from the constant flow of motors outside. So keeping them closed meant less cleaning up, which was OK with me.

Looking back, it's funny that I only ever thought of the thick soot with disgust in terms of my needing to sacrifice time to clean it. It probably should have raised some other alarm bells. Like the fact that I was actually inhaling all the crap coming in from outside.

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Let me start by saying that I am one of those people who's kind of always coughing. It's not terrible, and it may even be more of a tic than an actual biological need, but I do tend to cough more than the rest of the population. I've always had slight allergies so I just wrote it off as a symptom, popped an allergy pill, and figured it was helping. Maybe that's why I didn't notice how bad it had gotten.

I was coughing constantly—like all day, all the time. When I would lie down for bed, that's when it got even worse. I'd cough for about 10 minutes before falling asleep. I also cleared my throat—a lot—and it would take a couple tries before it actually felt like it was clear. I'd find myself apologizing to the people I worked with, saying things like, "sorry—I have no idea what's wrong with my throat today."

One afternoon my mom was over at my place and pointed out how frequently I was doing it. We were rearranging and cleaning out my room, and suddenly she zeroed in on the problem. "It's this pollution," she said. "I don't know how anyone could breathe in a place with this much dust."

She decided to buy me an air purifier that day and let me tell you...life changing! You just plug it in, turn it on, and let it run. I'd leave it on even when I went to work or out for the night so it could constantly be cleaning the air in my room. The machines aren't exactly small (this is the one I have), but they are so worth the space they take up—even in a Manhattan apartment. My cough got so much better. I actually felt like I could breathe again, and I wasn't having a coughing attack every night when I would lie down to go to bed. Amazing.

I've since moved down a couple streets so I'm no longer living on such a busy intersection. But I still have an air purifier in my apartment to help keep my health in check. If you're wondering whether or not you should invest in one, here are some reasons you may want to:

1. You live in an area with lots of pollution.

Like me, you may forget that pollution really does affect your health. "Proximity to an urban highway can increase the risk of less optimally controlled respiratory symptoms," explains Clifford Bassett, M.D., founder and medical director of Allergy and Asthma Care of New York. "Indoor air filtration has been found to provide a statistically significant improvement in a variety of respiratory symptoms." Read: If there are a million cars outside your window, an air purifier in your house will help you breathe easier.

2. You have seasonal allergies.

Pollution isn't the only thing making its way in your windows. Pollen and other allergens might be sneaking in there as well. Air filters last a decent amount of time, so you won't need to change yours as frequently as you may think, given all the stuff it's sucking up. Plus, it's easy to find and purchase new filters online—look for ones that have a HEPA rating; they capture more than 99 percent of the particulates that can irritate your respiratory system. Most machines have a light that comes on to let you know when it's time to replace the old filter.

3. You're allergic to pets, but you still own one—or your roommate or S.O. does.

It's possible that you're so used to the coughing and throat cleaning that you don't notice how it's affecting your respiratory system. Bassett says that an air purifier can reduce your exposure to pet allergens in your home. It could even help if your boo is coming over with Fido's hair stuck to his or her clothing.

4. You live with someone who smokes in the house.

There's no question about it—your lungs are being affected. While an air purifier won't be able to prevent you from inhaling the smoke all together, it can help make the air cleaner. “They're very effective in removing indoor airborne pollutants, namely tobacco, by trapping them on the filter materials,” says Bassett.

5. You just want to be sure you're breathing fresh, clean air in your home.

If you're able to get an air purifier, there's really no downside to it. (Note: some are louder than others so do your research first!) “Indoor air pollution is among the top five environmental health risks as per the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency,” explains Bassett. “So you should strive to eliminate or reduce sources of pollutants in your home.” If you're not ready to make the investment just yet, Bassett also recommends certain plants that can help clean your home, such as peace lily, bamboo palm, and English ivy.

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