



# CLEAN YOUR STUFF

How to clean your mold  
contaminated items.

Brought to you by the  
**#moldfinders** at **We Inspect**



# Disclaimer

There are no current standards for what constitutes "clean" when it comes to mold, bacteria, or biotoxins specific to personal belongings and contents.

Furthermore, due to everyone's unique health position, what may be "clean" for one person may not be "clean enough" for another person. Therefore, it is important to consult your medical professional and use judgment when determining what to clean and what to discard.

Without testing each item in question, you cannot know the true level of contamination of specific items. However, this testing can be expensive and in many cases doesn't make financial sense. In lieu of testing every individual item, a "home screening" test (including mold, bacteria and biotoxins) can be used as a representative sample of what has settled on contents throughout your home to help understand the overall level of contamination and next steps.

Always trust your body FIRST. If you feel like you are reacting to something, even if you think it should be able to be cleaned, we recommend leaning toward discarding that item.

Lastly, some items may never be clean enough, even though there is a process to attempt it. In those cases, discarding the item is recommended.

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# Before Getting Started

The purpose of this guide is to aid in attempting to remove cross-contamination from items that have been impacted by other sources. By cross-contamination, we are referring to spores or fine particles that have left or detached from the source mold or bacteria colonies and settled onto other surfaces in the home.

**This guide IS NOT meant to address the cleaning of items that have mold growing on them. Any item with physical mold growth should be discarded.**

## Protect Yourself

We cannot stress this enough... You **MUST** protect yourself with proper PPE (personal protective equipment) if you are cleaning items that have been in a suspected water damaged environment where mold and other contaminants or biotoxins have the potential to thrive.

You will likely come in close contact with these contaminants, and if you are not properly protected, you may have mild to severe health reactions.

Use effective masks, gloves, coverall suits, and safety glasses before performing any cleaning procedures.

Below are examples of PPE to consider for the cleaning processes.

- Half Respirator: [Amazon Link](#)
- Respirator Filters: [Amazon Link](#)
- Coverall Suit: [Amazon Link](#)
- Gloves: [Amazon Link](#)
- Safety Glasses: [Amazon Link](#)

## Cleaning Tools

Below are tools that will be helpful for the cleaning process. It is not a requirement to have or use all of these tools, but having them can increase the odds of effectiveness.

- Compressed Air (portable container or machine)
- HEPA Vacuum
- Microfiber Towels (many, many, many of them)





- Cleaning Solution Options\*
  - Benefect Decon 30, hydrogen peroxide, vinegar, EC3, thieves all purpose cleaner
- Laundry Solution Options\*
  - Vinegar, borax, thieves detergent, EC3 or just plain soap and water

\*Any cleaning solutions should be properly diluted and tested in a small area (or small batch of items) prior to full execution to ensure it does not result in abnormal health reactions, and that it does not damage your belongings.

## HEPA Vac: Where To Do The Cleaning

You should not clean your items inside of your home. You'll be disrupting particles and you do not want them moving and settling throughout your home; potentially creating a larger exposure issue. Note: This also includes an attached garage, as airflow from that garage is connected to your home.

One option is to set up a clean room in your garage (or other areas), where you use 6 mil plastic sheeting and negative pressure to section off an area that will prevent cross-contamination.

Another option is to simply clean items outside of the home.





# Content Cleaning Introduction

Most people have a good amount of "stuff," which makes this process difficult and overwhelming simply because there are just SO many decisions to be made. What I've found helpful for my clients is to have a philosophy and standardized process for cataloging all of your belongings. When following a structured plan, it helps to take emotional decision making out of the equation.

There are 2 elements to that equation. This section will define each element: **Content Type** and **Content Value**.

An important note:

A person's health changes. It gets better. It gets worse.

This means our reactions to specific items may change over time based on our current health position. For example, if we start healing, we may be more tolerant of items that previously triggered a health reaction. That said, having the flexibility to store things away until your health has improved can be very helpful and a way to salvage high priority items. Then once you are at a point where you are better, you can clean and slowly introduce items to see how you feel.

But let's start at the top. Here is what we DO NOT recommend cleaning.

## **Do Not Clean**

Any item that has visible mold growth

or

### Cushioned Porous Items

Cushioned items (mattresses, pillows, couch cushions, puffy jackets, stuffed animals, carpeting, etc.) are almost impossible to clean; as spores, fragments and toxins become embedded in the cushions. Once inside, there is no way to get them out. Every time you sit on or disturb the item, these particles are released and create additional exposures.



A potential exception to consider:

\*Small Cushioned Porous Items

There is an option to consider for smaller cushioned items. It is called the Esporta Washing System. I want to be clear, **I have never tested items that have been cleaned using this system and cannot vouch for its effectiveness.** However, I have clients that have used it and said they were happy with the results.

Any soft content item that can fit into an industrial sized washing machine can qualify for cleaning through the Esporta system. Per the company website, "*the Esporta Washing System removes bacteria, viruses, odor, soot, grime, mold, bio waste, and mildew, and restores over 90% of the soft contents found in a home.*"

## Content Types

**Solid Items:** Glass, metal, ceramic, tile

**Porous Items:** Fabric, paper, cardboard, area rugs

**Semi-Porous Items:** This is the most difficult set of items to wrap your head around. Anything not included in the *Do Not Clean*, *Solid* or *Porous* or categories, are semi-porous. So when you're looking to figure it out, just look at those other categories. If it doesn't fit into one of those, then it's semi-porous.

## Content Value

**Low Monetary Value:** These items are easily replaceable, and their cost for replacement is less than the cost of cleaning.

**High Monetary Value:** These items have a substantial expense associated with them and attempting to clean may be more cost effective than replacement.

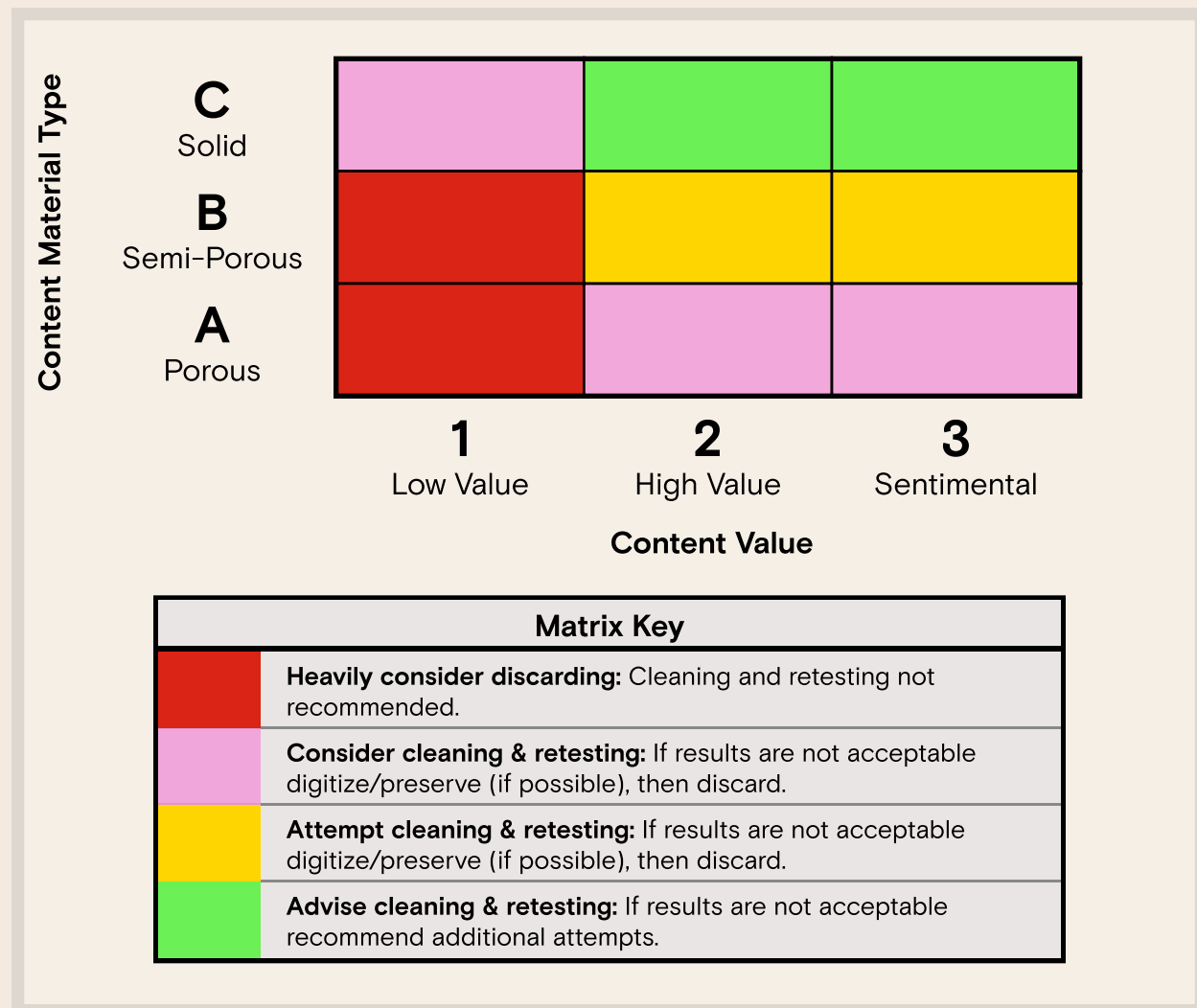
\*These may be contents that you store for a later time until you are better, and then attempt to clean.

**Sentimental Value:** These items are priceless or cannot be replaced. \*These may be contents that you store for a later time until you are better, and then attempt to clean.



# Content Cleaning Matrix

I created this chart to help visualize and categorize your contents. As you go through your belongings, grab a post it note and tag each one with the color and the square that is represented on the chart.



For example, let's say you're in your kitchen and open up the cabinet where your drinking glasses are located. These would be a **Solid** item of **Low Monetary Value**. On the chart, that area is pink (at the very top left). So you'd take a post-it and write "Pink C1" on the post-it, then tag them (if you get colored post-it notes it makes things even easier!). The C1 refers to Solid material and Low Monetary Value.





Let's do another one. Let's say you have an antique wood dresser that has been passed down in your family. That would be a **Semi-Porous** item of **Sentimental Value**. On the chart, that area is yellow (the middle square on the far right column). You'd write "Yellow B3" on the post-it, then tag the dresser. The B3 refers to semi porous and sentimental value.

Okay. Now that we know how to use the matrix, let's look at what the colors mean.

**Red:** items that one can heavily consider discarding. This is because they are easy to replace, and made of materials that may not be able to be cleaned.

**Pink:** items that one can consider cleaning. Note that I used the word "Consider". These items are either made of a material that will be very difficult to clean, or be of such low monetary value that they're easily replaceable. Ideally, if you can discard these, then consider it.

**Yellow:** items that one can attempt cleaning. Note that I used the word "Attempt". These items are in the semi-porous category, meaning they may not be able to be appropriately cleaned, but because of the value associated with them, it is worth a shot if you feel it's necessary.

**Green:** items where cleaning is advised. These items are solid, meaning they're easiest to clean, and the value is high.



# How to Clean

Now that we know what we are cleaning, let's talk about how to do it. If you recall, our goal is to remove cross contamination from items that have been impacted by other sources.

In other words, this is a fine particle cleaning at the surface level.

The thing about fine particles is that they travel on dirt and dust. So an easy way to think of this is **Spring Cleaning on Steroids**. Removing all dirt and dust from all items. And when you're done with that, remember that fine particles are invisible to the human eye... so do it one more time.

This is the general cleaning process and the order in which each step occurs. This process should be followed unless an alternative process is outlined in the "Common Items" section below.

## General Cleaning Process

1. **Compressed Air:** Dislodge any trapped particles
2. **HEPA Vacuum:** Remove all visible loose particles
3. **Damp Wipe:** Wipe away fine particles that remain, which are not visible by the human eye

**Compressed Air:** The use of compressed air is not always required. It is best used to dislodge collected dirt or dust from grooves or crevices in items that cannot be vacuumed or wiped away. One key example would be electronics, but it can be used anywhere that this occurs.

**HEPA Vacuum:** HEPA vacuuming is not always required. It's best suited for larger solid and semi porous items where you can see visible dirt or dust. However, it may not be necessary to HEPA vacuum every single plate or fork that you own. In that scenario you can simply skip to the Damp Wipe procedure.

**Damp Wipe:** This step should be applied to all items. An application of non-toxic environmentally safe cleaning solution. The solution should be applied from spray bottles directly to microfiber towels. The microfiber towels should be folded in quarters so the same side of the towel is never used more than once to wipe down surfaces.



Once all sides have been used, then the towels should be discarded.

Note: If you continue to use the same towel for multiple items/areas, then you'll just be spreading the problem around. When done properly, you will go through A LOT of microfiber towels.

# Item Categorization

Above we covered the general cleaning process for items in the home. But I know what you're thinking. It seems too general, and you have so many "special or unique" items. So what about those?

First, everything you own is either Solid, Porous or Semi-Porous... or is outlined in the Do Not Clean category.

EVERYTHING.

Let's try a few examples to get you in the right mindset.

**Fake house plants:** They're made of plastic. This is semi-porous because it is not included in the Do Not Clean, Solid or Porous or categories.

**Wood Dresser:** This is semi-porous because it is not included in the Do Not Clean, Solid or Porous or categories.

**Leather Handbag:** This is semi-porous because it is not included in the Do Not Clean, Solid or Porous or categories.

**Jewelry:** This is a solid material (metal).

**Lamp:** Is it made of glass or metal? Then it's Solid. Is it made of plastic? Then it's semi-porous.

**Lampshade:** Is it made of fabric? Then it's porous.



Sometimes you may even have an item that falls into 2 of the categories. If this is the case, always default your interpretation to the most porous category. The order from worst to best is as follows:

1. Do Not Clean
2. Porous
3. Semi-Porous
4. Solid

Here are a couple examples.

**Collectible Dolls:** Let's say they have a plastic head and arms, with other cushioned body parts. Although plastic is semi-porous, this would be considered an item in the Do Not Clean category as a \*Small Cushioned Item.

**Leather couch:** This is a Do Not Clean item \*Cushioned Porous, wrapped in a Semi-Porous material. We know leather is semi-porous because it is not included in the Do Not Clean, Solid or Porous or categories. It would be considered a Do Not Clean item.







# Common Items

These are some of the most common items that we get questions about. So I've outlined them below with details on how to clean them.

## Clothing / Linens (or other porous items that can fit into washing machine)

I had a client whose clothes were cross contaminated by mold and mycotoxins. They wanted to try to clean their clothes, and wanted testing to validate if it was successful. This was great because it gave me a case study.

They had 2 batches of clothes. One to be washed in a washing machine. And another to be dry cleaned.

They washed the first batch in the washing machine, but replaced regular detergent with diluted ammonia (3%) and water at the recommendation of their doctor. Please note: if you have chemical sensitivities, then this is likely not a good option for you! You should consult with your doctor before trying this.

The second batch was sent to a regular dry cleaner.

After the washing / cleaning, we tested the clothes again. In both batches, the mycotoxins were gone, and the mold was significantly reduced! The cleaning was successful.

It is my opinion that the ammonia or dry cleaning product was not what made the cleaning successful. But rather the agitation process that dislodged the particles from the fibers of the clothing. With this in mind, anything that can be placed in a washing machine or dry cleaned has the potential to be cleaned.

**Cleaning Products to Consider:** Vinegar, borax, thieves detergent, EC3 or just plain soap and water. \*Of course all solutions should be properly diluted and caution is also important to properly protect oneself with personal protection equipment to avoid exposure.

**Cleaning Process:** Wash clothes in a washing machine or dry clean.

\*Note, if the washing machine has mold in it, then this obviously won't work.



## Electronics

For the most part, these are all solid items. So why discuss them separately? First Electronics can be quite expensive, and in turn may warrant a cleaning attempt. Second, because many electronics have motors or fans that pull dust inside the unit.

So in addition to cleaning the exterior we have to address the interior somehow. A couple ways that can be achieved:

1. Opening up the item to get access to the interior for cleaning
2. Use compressed air to blow any dust or particles out of the crevices and microcavities

Once completed, you can then clean the exterior using the General Cleaning Process.

1. **Compressed Air:** Dislodge any trapped particles from microcavities
2. **HEPA Vacuum:** Remove all visible loose particles
3. **Damp Wipe:** Wipe away fine particles that remain, using the Damp Wipe procedure outlined above.

## Water Flow Appliances

The main examples here are refrigerators and washing machines. There are two elements to these items. The exterior and interior components. For the exterior, the General Cleaning Process will work fine.

As a reminder, if mold is visible on or inside any appliance, we recommend it be discarded.

## Paper / Books

Paper is a porous material making it very difficult to clean. The biggest challenge with paper is it's never just one piece of paper. It's hundreds or thousands of pieces of paper! Usually packed in files or books. So let's think about that.

How would you clean that? Are you cleaning every single piece of paper?

If you are, more power to you. But that isn't very realistic.



Let me tell you a story...

I had a client who had hundreds of books in a home full of mold and mycotoxins, and they didn't want to get rid of their books. They hired a content cleaning company to take 5 books to their "state of the art" cleaning facility, and clean them. Afterwards, I was going to go to that facility, and test the books in their "clean room" to see if it actually worked.

5 Books. Maybe 200 pages each. That's 1,000 pages.

Do you think the company opened every page in every book and cleaned them?

Nope.

How would they clean them anyway? You can't damp wipe paper, it will ruin it. So all they could do was HEPA vacuum. But you can't really do that on individual pieces of paper because you would just suck the paper into the vacuum.

They charged my client a bunch of money to HEPA vacuum the outside of each book. They didn't open one of them.

So when I tested them, I just opened 5 random pages in each book and swabbed them.

The results: Mold and Mycotoxins. Still there.

For files, if it is possible to digitize them, I'd do that. Or if they're files you keep "just in case" (like taxes from 10 years ago that you'll never open), then store them in a storage unit and go get them if you ever really need them.

For books, I'm sorry, but in my experience, there isn't an effective cleaning method. There are people that claim you can stick them in a room and ozone them and it will magically get rid of all the problems. I guess my response to that is, what about all the pages inside every book? How does the ozone get there?

But remember, if they are super valuable to you, you can store them away until your health has improved and then see if you can tolerate them.



## Photos / Paintings

These are similar to books in that we are talking about porous paper / canvas items, and that HEPA vacuuming or damp wiping may damage them.

The difference is that they're more easily accessible because they aren't a single page inside in the middle of a book.

With photos specifically, you may have a lot of them, so the time commitment may be significant to even attempt the cleaning process.

So is it possible to clean these? Maybe.

How would you do it? They would need to be damp wiped. If you are concerned about damaging the items, you can dry a dry wipe with something like a Swiffer pad.

Will it be as effective? Likely no.

Will it be clean enough for you specifically? I truly don't know.

I know photos and paintings typically fall into the "Sentimental Value" or "High Monetary Value" categories, so it makes addressing these difficult.

For photos, another alternative would be to digitize and reprint the photos. For paintings, it may not be as easy, so you'll have to evaluate your comfort level with a less than ideal cleaning process.





# Avoid This Mistake

Something I see happen all the time is clients getting laser focused on how to clean or salvage specific belongings. Sometimes an entire consultation call that was meant to review sample results and remediation recommendations turns into my client spending an hour asking about what seems to be every single item they own and if they can clean it.

I guess it makes sense when you think about it. They feel like they are losing their home and there's nothing they can do about it (there is, by the way). Remediating your home can feel like a big unknown.

Where is the mold? How did it get there? How did it spread through the house? How do you get rid of it?

It's a whole new world that many people don't understand, and they feel like it's completely out of their control.

But their stuff is different.

They know these things. They've had them for years. They can hold them. They can see them, and they don't look contaminated.

The next thing you know, they are convincing themselves that they don't need to clean or discard certain items, many times to their own detriment.

Try not to fall into this trap.

Instead, remember why you are even researching how to clean your stuff. You didn't start this journey because you're passionate about cleaning.

Your health is affected.

- Is Grandma's dresser really worth you feeling sick? She wouldn't want that.
- Is that old chair from your college dorm worth you feeling sick? College You wouldn't want that.
- Is your son's stuffed animal worth you feeling sick? He wouldn't want that. He also probably doesn't care about that thing nearly as much as you do.

This is about your health. Always remember that.



# Final Thoughts

You can see from this guide that I don't think you always have to get rid of everything you own if you've been in a moldy environment. But there are some things you should definitely discard.

At the end of the day, you're never going to be completely shielded from mold exposure. There will ALWAYS be some level of mold in your home. Even after remediation. Even after cleaning your items. Any other expectation is not realistic.

The silver lining is that our bodies were built to detoxify. Some of us just need extra help.

With that in mind, if you chose to clean or discard 90% of your items in the appropriate way, and for some reason you just can't get yourself to go "all-in" on a few particular items, is that completely unacceptable?

For most people, I don't think so.

If you've reduced your exposure by 90%, that's a lot less toxic junk for your body to detoxify. Many times that may be enough.

But for some people, the most hypersensitive of people, not going all the way may not be an option. If you fall into this category, you know who you are.

With that I'll share one final theory. It's called the "Gut Feeling" Theory.

You've probably heard the phrase "gut feeling" before. I'm a big believer in listening to my gut, even when I don't know why it's telling me to do something. Looking back in time, there are definitely times that I've listened to that feeling to avoid something quite bad.

I've always thought that "gut feeling" is our body being aware of a situation and knowing it's not good for us. But for some reason, it can't tell our brain in a way it can understand. Instead, it creates a feeling that bypasses our brain's analytical nature and creates a feeling to immediately warn us of something that may harm us.

If you're thinking about keeping or discarding an item, and you get a "gut feeling" about it.

Trust your gut.