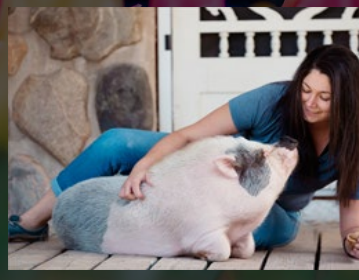




African swine fever poses a risk to Canada



Celebrating cultural traditions through food



3 semi-unusual pets and why people love them



Rules for importing food to Canada



Mother's Day: 3 sure-fire ways to show your mom some love

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5 ways to help seniors maintain their independence



(NC) Older adulthood can be one of the most fulfilling times in a person's life, but many of us worry about losing our independence. Whether you're looking ahead for your future self or thinking of ways to help older family members, here are five ideas to help seniors age in place and stay independent for longer.

1. Nourish a zest for life

Isolation can be hard on anyone's mental health, and seniors may be especially at risk. Moving the body, engaging the mind and being a part of community can go a long way to help

seniors maintain independence. These activities can help sustain day-to-day motivation and a zest for life. While older seniors may not have as much strength or stamina as they once did, there are still ways to be active and engaged, including through social activity groups geared to seniors.

2. Look for main-floor living

Most homes have a main-floor kitchen, but what about a bathroom and bedroom? Having these spaces on one floor can help an older senior live comfortably and safely, even if stairs become a significant challenge or risk for them. Open floorplans with wide doorways and hallways - and room to manoeuvre in them - are also features that help inhabitants age in place gracefully. These should be top of mind if renovations or downsizing are in consideration.

3. Make simple home updates

Small changes at home can extend the time someone can feasibly live there independently. These are just a few: Install grab bars in the bathroom and put a stool to sit on in the walk-in shower; swap out round doorknobs for lever-style handles that require less strength and dexterity to use - especially for those with arthritis; keep storage within easy reach and take advantage of pull-out cabinet systems and full-extension drawers for ease of access.

4. See about support

Seniors and their families don't have to navigate the challenges of getting old alone. Beyond the support of friends and other family members, health-care professionals like doctors or occupational therapists can help. For example, an occupational therapist can do a home assessment to identify potential hazards or help build strategies that make it safer and easier for seniors to do the things that matter to them, from personal hygiene to hobbies.

5. Embrace helpful tools

Health-care professionals might suggest tools to make life easier and more enjoyable, such as hearing aids or a walker. These assistive devices can be a major source of safety, as well as a confidence booster when they enable someone to continue living independently. The sooner a tool is embraced, the easier and quicker it is to get comfortable using.

In Ontario, occupational therapists are regulated by the College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario. Find out more about what they do and what to expect from an appointment at coto.org/ot.

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Top tips to make your cottage safer for all ages and abilities



(NC) For many Canadians, their cottage is their favourite place on Earth. However, visiting a cottage can often be a challenge for people with physical or cognitive issues. Here are five areas the College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario recommends focusing on to make your cottage safe for guests of all ages and abilities.

Entrance

Cottages are often built on hilly terrain, meaning you need to climb up or down a flight of stairs to get to the front door. If that's the case at your cottage, is there a way to build a ramp or a lift for safe access? If not, is there a side door on level ground that guests can use?

Bedroom

If possible, consider making at least one bedroom fully accessible. You may need to make space on the main level for a bedroom, with a door wide enough for a wheelchair or walker to pass through, for example. Adding motion or voice-activated lights can also help people with vision issues avoid tripping hazards.

Bathroom

Having an accessible bathroom is essential. It should have an open area large enough for a wheelchair or walker to manoeuvre in, grab bars by the toilet and in the bathing area, and a barrier-free bathtub or shower stall.

Kitchen

There are a few low-cost, DIY steps you can take to make a kitchen more accessible. For example, replacing small and hard-to-grip doorknobs and handles with large U-shaped ones that are easier to open with arthritic hands, or installing a motion- or voice-activated faucet.

If you have the budget for it, some motorized cabinets and countertops rise and lower at the push of a button.

Exterior

Cottage country often features some steep and tricky terrain to navigate. If possible, grade the soil so there's an even walkway free of roots and other tripping hazards. Or build a slightly raised boardwalk with a railing along one or both sides. In some cases, you might want to invest in an exterior lift to get from an elevated cottage down to the water.

Find more information about how licensed occupational therapists can help make homes and cottages accessible at coto.org/ot.

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Tips for pain-free gardening this spring



(NC) Many of us feel a fresh desire to tend to yard work or gardening in springtime. These are great ways to get some exercise and de-stress.

And, even if health issues like back pain, arthritis or mobility can get in the way, there are many things you can do to continue your hobby.

Cushions or a chair may reduce strain on your back and knees.

Tools like garden scooters and long-handled trowels may help when bending forward.

An occupational therapist can also help you figure out different ways of doing things that work best for you.

These health-care professionals are trained to find strategies to keep you doing everyday activities. They assess your needs and recommend ways to adapt your environment, to learn or rebuild skills, or to use tools that make tasks easier.

In this province, all occupational therapists have to meet professional standards and be licensed by the College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario. Find more information at coto.org/ot.

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Agriculture & Livestock

Getting to know who grows your food



(NC) From berries and peaches to beans and field greens, summer means many of Ontario's fruit and vegetable crops are now in season.

A great way to learn more about how those crops are grown - and by whom - is by shopping at local farmers' markets or stopping in at an on-farm market and chatting directly with the farmers themselves.

One of the more remarkable things you can learn is that along with thousands of local farm families and employees, Ontario's fruit and vegetable farms employ approximately 20,000 international farm workers who fill essential jobs growing and harvesting the homegrown produce Ontarians love.

Many of these workers have been coming here for years or even decades - attracted by jobs through the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program and the agriculture stream of the federal Temporary Foreign Worker program that are helping them build homes, start businesses and send their kids to school in their home countries.

And, Ontario farmers like Luke Charbonneau of Hi-Berry Farm near Port Elgin are eager to hire them, as agriculture has long had one of the highest vacancy rates of any sector in the country.

"This is a skilled workforce who have been coming here for 20 years. They know our business and know our operation. We certainly wouldn't be farming without them," he says. "We've become friends, have found out about their families and what motivates them to come here to Canada. They love their country. But they're here for a reason - to make a better life for their whole families."

Daniel Morales from Mexico has been working at Charbonneau's farm for more than a decade, arriving in spring for planting and going home in November after the last crops, from asparagus and strawberries in spring to cabbage and potatoes in the fall, have been harvested.

"I came to work here because for me, it is a great opportunity to learn new experiences and support my family," he says. "Canada has been a country that opens its doors to us, and the people are very friendly. They wait for us every year and welcome us as if it is our second home."

Learn more about the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program at morethanamigrantworker.ca.

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5 tips to keep your farm animals safe



(NC) During escalating challenges such as wildfires, flooding, extreme temperatures and the threat of viruses, the well-being of your animals is important. From comprehensive emergency planning to biosecurity measures and careful feeding practices, here are five tips to keep your animals safe and healthy.

Have an emergency plan

Establish an emergency plan to keep your animals safe. Include details like transportation and evacuation routes when possible, along with copies of important documents like veterinary records and property maps. Ensure you have a two-week supply of feed, water and medications for your animals. By planning ahead you'll be able to make quick and effective decisions during a crisis.

Biosecurity is not a buzzword

Strong biosecurity measures are an important way to prevent the spread of diseases and contaminants to your flock or herd year-round. They typically involve steps such as isolating new animals from others for two weeks, establishing visitor protocols, and ensuring proper procedures for boot and handwashing, as well as equipment cleaning. When travelling abroad, ensure you follow protocols so diseases aren't accidentally introduced to animals.

Given a global risk of diseases like African swine fever (ASF), biosecurity is the most important measure to stop the spread if it is ever detected in Canada. While this viral disease cannot be transmitted to humans and is not a food-safety risk, it is almost always deadly for pigs. They could catch it from an infected pig or through contact with contaminated clothing and farm equipment.

Caution with food scraps as feed

Food recycle programs that gather surplus food from grocers, and repurposing kitchen scraps may seem like practical ways to reduce food waste, but it's important to exercise caution. Avoid feeding scraps to animals because the food could impact their nutrition or be contaminated. For pigs, ASF can be spread through small amounts of contaminated pork product which is why it is illegal in Canada to feed pigs meat.

Wild animals are not friends

While your animals may spend time outside, it's important to protect them from potential disease carriers like birds, foxes and wild pigs. Despite not being traditional predators, birds can spread avian influenza, and wild pigs can transmit ASF if it spreads to Canada. Ensure your animals do not have contact with wild animals.

Monitor your animals closely

Regularly observe your animals for any behavioural or physical changes. This will help you spot subtle signs of poor health before issues become more serious or illness spreads further.

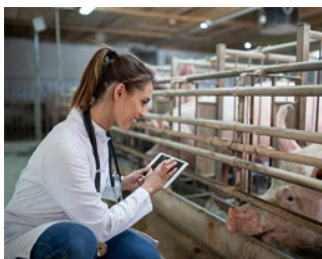
Learn more about how to protect your animals from ASF on the Canadian Food Inspection Agency website at inspection.gc.ca/asf-biosecurity.

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African swine fever poses a risk to Canada



(NC) There is a contagion quietly making its way across the globe, but it has not been found in Canada: African swine fever (ASF). The virus is contagious for pigs and has an extremely high mortality rate, affecting all pigs, whether farmed or wild. You may not have heard about it, because people cannot catch it. But that doesn't mean that it can't affect you.

Although ASF does not pose a threat to human health, if it were to be found in Canada, it would have severe consequences for not only pigs, but also the country's pork industry, valued at nearly \$24 billion. With mortality rates of up to 70 per cent for moderate cases and nearly 100 per cent for serious ones, an outbreak would not only jeopardize farmers' livelihoods but also stop the export of Canadian pork products. Since Canada is one of the world's top exporters of pork, this would put a strain on the global food system.

One of the significant challenges in preventing a possible spread of ASF in Canada is the presence of wild pigs. These species are not native to Canada but have an increased presence in the Prairies since the 1990s. Not only do they cause ecological damage, but they also serve as potential carriers of ASF. In Europe, it's been shown that wild pigs can contribute to the spread of the disease, highlighting the importance of strict biosecurity measures on farms to prevent transmission from wild to farmed pigs.

While the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is working to mitigate the risk of ASF entering the country, people who travel outside the country can also help protect Canada's pig populations, farmers and economy. For example, never bring pork products into Canada from abroad, as ASF can be found in contaminated food.

Upholding biosecurity measures on farms is also an essential way to minimize the risk of ASF transmission. Free resources are available for pig farmers to learn more about best practices to safeguard their herds and contribute to the protection Canada's pigs.

Find more information on biosecurity measures, at inspection.canada.ca/asf-biosecurity.

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Auto

Top 10 tips to prevent car theft



(NC) Car theft is on the rise and costs Canadians more than \$1 billion annually.

Car thieves are prioritizing easy marks - convenient, low-risk opportunities to steal. By making it inconvenient, you can protect yourself against vehicle theft. Here are 10 simple precautions recommended by Co-operators to help ensure your vehicle is waiting for you when you step outside.

1. Make sure your vehicle isn't left running unattended, even for just a few minutes.
2. Make sure to lock your vehicle and close the windows.
3. Keep your keys or keyless fob away from doors and windows. If your car has a keyless ignition, use a Faraday bag that blocks the signal from your key fob and prevents it from being hacked by thieves to gain entry to your vehicle.
4. Use after-market deterrents such as steering-wheel or brake-pedal locks, or alarm systems.
5. Add a vehicle tracking device.
6. Talk to your mechanic about installing an immobilizing device to prevent hotwiring.
7. Park in well-lit, populated areas or in secured garages.
8. Don't keep personal identification or valuables in your vehicle. Ensure your possessions are stowed out of sight and in your trunk if you are away from home.
9. Before purchasing a vehicle, do some research and request all required documentation from the seller. If a deal feels too good to be true, be sure to listen to your instincts. Wait to get the verification you need before proceeding.
10. To avoid theft while selling your vehicle, ensure you meet in a safe, well-lit, third-party location such as a busy parking lot or outside your local police precinct. When it's time to receive payment, do so at a physical bank so you can verify the payment method used.

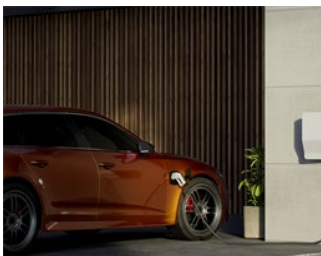
Find more information about car theft prevention through your insurance advisor or at cooperators.ca. Depending on what vehicle you drive, and what theft prevention steps you take, you might even be able to secure a discount on your premiums.

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4 things to know about zero-emission vehicles



(NC) Did you know that electric vehicles (EVs) were cruising around for decades before the first cars powered by internal combustion engines hit the road? EVs, also known as zero-emission vehicles, or ZEVs, have come a long way since the first ones were invented nearly a century ago. If you're curious about buying one, here are four things you should know.

Cost to own

Electricity isn't free, but the cost to charge an EV battery is far lower than the price of gas. And beyond the savings at the pump, EVs can be cheaper to maintain than standard vehicles.

For one, there's no need for regular oil changes and tune-ups. There are also very few moving parts in an EV compared to a gas or diesel vehicle, meaning fewer things to wear out and break down, like transmission and exhaust systems.

Range per charge

One of the main concerns people have about EVs is their range. Most EVs on the market have a driving range of at least 200 to 300 km, with the top-performing ones being able to travel 600 km or more on a single charge. If you need a mix of

long and shorter trips, you might consider a plug-in hybrid vehicle that runs on battery power and then switches over to a combustion engine when the battery is depleted.

Rebate eligibility

Across Canada, the federal government's Incentives for Zero-Emission Vehicles Program offers rebates of up to \$5,000 for the purchase or lease of EVs for personal use.

There's also a program for businesses looking to buy or lease medium- or heavy-duty work vehicles. It's called the Incentives for Medium- and Heavy-Duty Zero-Emission Vehicles Program, with incentives of up to \$200,000 per eligible vehicle.

Learn more about these programs by searching zero-emission vehicles on canada.ca.

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Career & Education

How migrant workers cope with life in Canada



(NC) With a climate that varies as much between summer and winter as Canada's, we have a lot of seasonal jobs in our country. Lawn maintenance or snow removal are common examples. A lot of jobs in Canada's food production system are seasonal too.

That's one of the many reasons that Ontario fruit and vegetable growers hire more than 20,000 seasonal workers to help them grow and harvest the more than 120 fruit and vegetable crops grown in the province.

These workers come to Canada through the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program, which was first launched in 1966, or the Temporary Foreign Worker program. It is common for many to return to the same farm year after year, where their experience and skills make them valued members of the farming business.

It's this opportunity to earn more money than they could at home that brings most workers here. And even though it's hard to be away from home for long periods of time, they say they find ways to keep busy when they're not working.

Mexican migrant farm worker Paulino Espinobarros Velazquez brings his trumpet with him when he comes to Ontario for his job at a greenhouse in Kingsville and he tries to play every day. Errol Mitchell, who has been coming to Canada from Jamaica annually for more than 15 years, loves to listen to music and cook, including for his co-workers.

And, every August, the Farms of Norfolk Football Tournament in Simcoe brings together teams of international farm workers for a day of friendly soccer competition and cultural connection. Similar tournaments are held in Lambton County and in the Leamington area.

"Football is everything for me," says Siven Smith, who is a physical education teacher at home in Jamaica. "Knowing that we work hard and can get to enjoy ourselves - this is where we relax, calm our mind. My favourite part was scoring goals and being successful."

Learn more about international farm workers at morethanamigrantworker.ca.

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Are there migrant workers at the root of your fruits and vegetables?



(NC) From asparagus and apples to peaches and parsnips, Ontario farmers grow more than 120 fruit and vegetable crops.

What many Ontarians don't know, however, is the role that 20,000 international farm workers who come to Canada through the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program or the federal Temporary Foreign Worker program play in getting those crops from plant to plate.

Unlike many other agricultural crops, fruits and vegetables often bruise or damage easily, so they need to be planted, harvested and cared for by hand instead of by machine.

Since 2015, Fernando Nieto Rodrigues has been coming to Canada to work on fruit and vegetable farms and make a better life for his family in Mexico. He's proud of being able to send his daughter to university and of the role he plays in feeding Canadians.

“We do our work with pride, with care, and we come here to do things right. We are not just workers; we are people who come to give our best to this country, to help our economy and help Canada’s economy,” Rodrigues says.

Once here, these workers have the same employment-related rights and benefits as local workers doing the same work. In Ontario, that includes government-approved wage rates, health care under OHIP, the Canada Pension Plan, coverage under the Employment Standards Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act, and more.

Leon Brown came from Jamaica to Canada annually starting in 1990. Now retired, he worked at Meyers Farms in Niagara Region until 2023.

“That was my last year in Canada. I could have stayed home, but I decided to work one more year,” he says. “I’ll be eligible for a pension when I retire. I’m looking forward to that; that’s a great opportunity.”

Learn more about Ontario’s seasonal agricultural workers morethanamigrantworker.ca.

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Environment & Nature

5 eco-friendly Earth Day swaps to consider this year



(NC) Living a more sustainable life is something many of us aim for year-round, but Earth Day, which falls on April 22nd every year, provides an annual reminder of what we can do to help the environment. Here are five ideas of sustainable swaps for your day-to-day life to help you get started.

1. Switch to solids

Many of us use various liquid soaps to clean dishes and laundry and to wash our hair or body. But most of these liquid suds come in plastic containers and are watered down. Save the expense and reduce extra plastic waste by opting for bar soaps instead. There are bars made for dishes, and there are dissolvable sheets of soap for the laundry machine. Check your local health food store if your grocery store doesn't stock them. And don't worry - there are shampoo bars made specifically for different hair types, so you won't destroy your mane.

2. Lose the old lightbulbs

If you haven't changed out old incandescent lightbulbs for the LED variety yet, know that energy-efficient certified LEDs last 15 times longer than incandescent bulbs and use 90 per cent less energy. If you tried them long ago and found them too harsh, look again. There are more warm tones of light to choose from than when they first came on the scene. Look for the "lumens" value to see how bright it will be rather than the wattage - the higher the lumens, the brighter the light.

3. Ditch disposables and duplicates

Many of us often grab single-use, disposable products, like a takeout coffee cup or a cotton swab. But these short-lived products only add to our waste. While some are biodegradable, it's still best for the environment when we create less waste overall. So, swap in cloth bags, metal straws, glass food containers, washable cotton swabs, reusable water bottles and so on. But also keep an eye on how many reusable products you buy, too. Donate items that you rarely use and resist the temptation to buy more.

4. Consider e-receipts

How often do you buy something, take your receipt and then toss the paper out, whether right when you get home or months down the line? Next time you're shopping, consider saying no to a paper receipt - much of this paper has a coating that can't be recycled. And the less paper we need to recycle the better. Retailers are increasingly offering to email receipts, so you can still keep a record of the transaction. Having the digital copy makes it easy to find if you need to do a return, too. If you're a business owner, give customers the option for an e-receipt before they have to ask - you'll save on paper too.

5. Opt for electric

Many of us must rely on a car or truck for work or life activities. If that's you, consider the pros and cons of investing in an electric vehicle (EV). EVs can make a big difference to your carbon footprint and save you money on gas day-to-day. Compared across their life cycles, they are more environmentally friendly than gas or diesel. And you might be surprised at how much charging networks and battery range have improved in recent years.

If that sounds like an expensive swap, check out incentive programs for EVs. The Government of Canada offers incentives on the purchase or lease of light-duty vehicles for individuals and families through the Incentives for Zero-Emission Vehicles program. Businesses and other organizations looking to swap out larger commercial vehicles can check out the Incentives for Medium- and Heavy-Duty Zero-Emission Vehicles program for rebates on electric or plug-in hybrid vans, trucks, coach buses and more. These incentives are applied by the dealer when you buy the vehicle, and they can be combined with other applicable rebates.

Find more information on both of these programs by searching zero-emission vehicles on canada.ca.

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4 easy tips to minimize your carbon footprint - and save money



(NC) Many of us understand that lowering our individual carbon footprint is a small but mighty thing we should be doing to fight climate change. But if that feels like a huge, complicated and expensive ask, here are four simple things you can try that will also cut your costs.

1. Cut the meat

In 2021, the agricultural sector accounted for 10 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions in Canada, mainly from crop and animal production, according to Environment and Climate Change Canada. By going without meat and dairy at least once a week and choosing hearty beans and veggies instead, you can reduce how much you're contributing. You'll also give your wallet a break since dairy and meat are some of the most expensive items at the grocery store.

2. Optimize energy

Heating and cooling our homes is often one of the costliest parts of our monthly bills. So do what you can to make your home more energy efficient. You could install low-cost weatherstripping to seal out drafts or use a smart thermostat to program heating and cooling automatically based on your schedule. You'll lower how much energy your home needs to stay comfortable and save some cash on those costs.

3. Green your wheels

Walking, public transit and cycling are low-cost, low- or no-emissions ways to get around, plus you'll save on the cost of transportation. But many of us have no choice but to rely on a car or truck. If you have to drive anyway, making that vehicle an electric one can make a big difference to your carbon footprint and help you save money on gas and maintenance day-to-day. While they may not be perfect, what vehicle is? You might be surprised at how much charging networks and battery range have improved in recent years.

4. Make use of rebates

When the initial purchasing price of a green product is holding you back, double check with retailers, utility providers and government agencies to see if there are any rebate or incentive programs to help you afford them. There are a variety of rebates that can cover some home energy efficiency upgrades, such as using a smart thermostat or replacing your heating and cooling system with a heat pump - and these upgrades will also help lower your energy bills.

When it comes to electric vehicles, you might know that individuals and families can save up to \$5,000 off the price of an EV through the federal Incentives for Zero-Emission Vehicles program. There's also an incentive for businesses that need to buy or lease zero-emission medium- or heavy-duty work vehicles. Called the Incentives for Medium- and Heavy-Duty Zero-Emission Vehicles program this business rebate of up to \$200,000 applies to qualifying vans, trucks, coach buses, semi-trucks and more. The rebate is applied at the time of purchase and can be combined with other provincial rebates too.

Learn more about these programs by searching zero-emission vehicles on canada.ca.

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Family & Community

Mother's Day: 3 sure-fire ways to show your mom some love



(NC) Mother's Day is on the second Sunday of May every year. This year, that means it's on Sunday, May 12. Which also means you don't have a lot of time to pull together gifts and ideas to show her how important she is to you. Here are three ideas to get you started.

A shared interest

Your relationship with your mom can be complicated. Consider finding fresh ways to connect this Mother's Day and then seeing where they lead you. Taking advantage of a shared interest can be a great way to create a reliable conversation starter or spend low-key time together.

For example, if you're both into history you could introduce her to a podcast like Parks Canada's ReCollections, which brings listeners fascinating stories from national historic sites across the country. That should get you talking.



parks.canada.ca/reollections

A delicious meal

Brunch or breakfast in bed is a classic Mother's Day gift that never goes out of style. Consider switching it up a little this year by opting for a theme. It could be anything from creating an international feast to choosing only local ingredients. You can learn about local growing from the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association. Or, give traditional brunch options a twist; think huevos rancheros, a sweet and crunchy salad, or get fancy by grilling asparagus wrapped in prosciutto.



ofvga.org

A favourite scent to savour

Candles, perfumes, bath bombs and the like are classic gifts for mom, containing essential oils that provide exquisite scents that transport her to another time or place. Just remember that even though essential oils are substances made from plants, that doesn't mean they are always safe. Under the federal government's Chemicals Management Plan, Health Canada has been evaluating the safety of different essential oils. Keep an eye out for any findings and remind mom to always follow the product's directions.



canada.ca/healthy-home

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Finance - Business

3 ways any business can step up for Earth Day



(NC) As the realities of climate change are increasingly visible, and communities across the country and around the world battle more extreme temperatures and weather events, many businesses are feeling the pressure to walk the talk when it comes to environmental sustainability.

Here are three ways a business can be more environmentally conscious - on Earth Day and beyond.

Start a conversation

Slowing down climate change is a group effort, so connect with your partners, clients, customers and employees about what you can all do. Maybe it's a commitment to stocking sustainably produced products, adopting recycled packaging or hosting an eco-awareness event or fundraiser on Earth Day. Take advantage of social media to share what you're doing for the planet and why. It's not just good for the Earth, it's also good for business.

Do an energy audit

Familiar to some homeowners, business owners may also be able to book an expert to evaluate the energy efficiency of their property. The auditor provides a big picture of how well your space, be it a storage facility, workshop or boutique, uses energy and how you can improve that usage. Depending on the service, they could also evaluate your supply chain and other aspects of sustainability and recommend improvements.

If an audit is not in the cards, examine the energy your business uses and when. Could the dishwasher in the employee kitchen be set to run at night? Can you automate the lights to turn on with motion instead of leaving them on all night? Even simple fixes can make a big difference, such as programming your thermostat to automate temperature changes on a set schedule.

Green your vehicles

If your business relies on vehicles to get the job done, it might be worth going electric. On top of reducing your carbon emissions, electric vehicles (EVs) will save you money on gas at the pump as well as on maintenance and tune-up costs. Plus, you might be able to get a government rebate to offset the purchase price.

The Incentives for Medium- and Heavy-Duty Zero-Emission Vehicles program offers substantial rebates on the cost of buying or leasing electric or plug-in hybrid commercial vehicles. The rebate applies to qualifying vans, trucks, coach buses, semi-trucks and more. It's applied by the dealer at the point of sale, and you can combine it with other applicable rebates.

Find more information at canada.ca/medium-heavy-zero-emission-vehicles.

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Rules for importing food to Canada



(NC) More food than ever before is being traded across borders. Many of the foods we eat and ingredients we use are imported - from spices, nuts and snack foods to coffee, tea and other beverages.

While all this can bring adventure to our taste buds, more trade can add potential risks to foods.

This is why it is so important for businesses to stay up to date with new requirements from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, including the Safe Food for Canadians Regulations.

These regulations apply to all food that's imported, exported or traded between provinces. Any business importing food or beverages into Canada needs a valid food safety licence.

As of February 2024, food safety licences will be automatically verified for imports of manufactured foods. Without a valid licence, shipments may be denied entry into Canada.

It is each food business owner's responsibility to ensure their licence is valid and they are proactive about meeting all rules and regulations when importing food products.

Learn more about food import requirements at inspection.canada.ca/foodrules.

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A new incentive to green-up your fleet



(NC) With companies increasingly focused on environmental, social and governance best-practices, looking for ways to reduce their carbon footprint is a top priority for many of them. But investing in green products and materials often costs more than the conventional alternatives.

Electric vehicles (EVs), for example, can be substantially more expensive to purchase than a similar vehicle with a gasoline engine.

However, federal programs help offset the higher upfront cost of buying an EV. The Incentives for Zero-Emission Vehicles Program offers rebates of up to \$5,000 for the purchase or lease of EVs for personal use.

There's also a new program for businesses looking to buy or lease work vehicles. It's called the Incentives for Medium- and Heavy-Duty Zero-Emission Vehicles (iMHZEV) program, and it offers companies and organizations rebates of up to \$200,000 on the cost of buying or leasing a zero-emission commercial vehicle.

The business rebate applies to qualifying vans, trucks, coach buses, semi-trucks and more.

It's applied at the point of sale by the dealer, and it can be combined with any other provincial or territorial EV rebates available where you operate. It applies to purchases or 48-month leases. Shorter leases are prorated according to the lease period.

Businesses may be eligible for up to 10 iMHZEV incentives per calendar year, up to a maximum combined rebate of \$1 million.

Beyond the savings at the pump, EVs can be much cheaper to maintain than standard vehicles. For one, there's no need for regular oil changes and tune-ups. There are also fewer moving parts in an EV, meaning fewer things to wear out and break down, like transmission and exhaust systems.

Learn more about these programs by searching zero-emission vehicles on canada.ca.

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Finance - Personal

Are Canadians investing in themselves?



(NC) Inflation is affecting families everywhere, making it harder to make ends meet and plan for the future. In a new survey by Co-operators, 40 per cent of Canadians reported they haven't been able to save as much as they would like, with one in five admitting they haven't begun saving at all.

According to the poll, renters are nearly twice as likely as homeowners with a mortgage to have concerns and confusion about how they will fund their retirement and more than half of Canadians plan to reduce their expenses this year.

“Canadians are facing a tough choice - paying for living expenses today or putting some money away for tomorrow. But by setting aside their long-term goals, they're risking a bleak future,” says Jessica Baker, executive vice president of retail wealth at Co-operators. “The fact of the matter is, it's not a question of either-or. Experienced financial advisors can help you figure out a way to manage day-to-day expenses while maintaining a long-term plan for financial stability.”

Speaking with a licensed financial representative is the first step to saving with confidence. They're experts in helping balance your budget with your goals to create a financial plan that is right for you. Whether you're saving for a vacation, retirement, or an emergency fund, your plan is the roadmap to get you there. They can also help you pick the best investments to meet those goals - whether that's a Tax-Free Savings Account, a registered fund to save for your retirement or your children's education, or a straightforward savings plan.

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What to do if you have problems with your telecom service provider



(NC) Many of us know how frustrating it is to wait on hold for your phone, TV or internet provider to solve issues like connectivity problems, billing errors or other concerns. You just make it through the various layers of customer service and the problem gets resolved. But what about when it doesn't? What if you contact your service provider and they don't - or won't - fix the problem?

Well, in Canada, we have ombudsman organizations that you can take your complaint to - they're designed to help with issues between service providers and customers. Here's how:

Document the issue

Write down what the issue is and outline the steps you have taken to solve it with the provider. Include relevant dates. Keeping records of your communications with the service provider can help jog your memory and back up your claims.

Decide what you hope to achieve

From a simple apology from the provider, to getting back a payment, receiving additional compensation or something else entirely, think about what you would consider a reasonable resolution.

Submit a complaint to the ombudsman

The Commission for Complaints for Telecom-television Services, or CCTS, is the national, independent and impartial resolution service you can escalate your complaint to if your phone, internet or TV provider hasn't solved a problem. Their services are available in English or French and are provided free of charge.

It takes about 15 minutes to file a complaint online: you input the details about the situation and the solution you think is fair. If your issue is outside of their mandate, they'll let you know and, if possible, refer you elsewhere. Most complaints filed with the organization are resolved within 30 days.

Learn more about the organization and how to submit a complaint at ccts-cprst.ca.

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How buying green saves you money now and in the future



(NC) Many green or eco-friendly purchases can be more expensive than their less environmentally friendly counterparts, but there are still savings to be found in making green swaps, both now and in the long run.

On a small scale, going vegetarian one night a week will cut your grocery bill down, since meat is almost always one of the most expensive items to buy. Choosing imperfect-looking or near-expiry produce may also save you some cash while cutting down on food waste - which decomposes into greenhouse gases.

Using a bar of dish soap, body wash or shampoo also cuts down on plastic waste. Plus, solids typically last far longer than your plastic bottle of liquid soap, so you don't have to pay up as often.

Looking for incentive or rebate programs for bigger-ticket items can also help you save now on good-for-the-planet purchases that allow you to keep saving over time.

Electric vehicles (EVs), for example, help you avoid the emissions of gas vehicles. Though they typically have a higher price tag than traditional vehicles, the electricity EVs require for charging costs you a lot less than gas at the pump. Plus, they're generally more affordable to maintain since you don't need oil changes and tune-ups, and there are fewer of the moving parts that tend to break down in traditional vehicles like exhaust and transmission systems.

And, there are rebates available for electric vehicles. The federal government's Incentives for Zero-Emission Vehicles program offers rebates up to \$5,000 on the purchase or lease of qualifying EVs for families and individuals.

For Canadian businesses that need vans, trucks or other commercial vehicles, there is a program called the Incentives for Medium- and Heavy-Duty Zero-Emission Vehicles program.

It's a rebate of up to \$200,000 per vehicle applied at the point of sale on qualifying vans, trucks, coach buses, semi-trucks and more. It can be combined with other EV rebates available where you live.

Find out more about these programs by searching zero-emission vehicles on canada.ca.

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3 ways you can fight for your rights



(NC) Nobody likes to get pushed around. As a kid, we're taught to speak to a teacher, parent or guardian if we're being bullied. But, as an adult, who do you turn to if you think someone is being unfair or trying to take advantage of you? Here's how to find recourse for three common aspects of adulthood.

Employee's rights

Getting fired or laid off from a job is extremely stressful, particularly if it comes as a surprise. Your employer will likely offer you some sort of compensation package as part of the termination. But you don't necessarily need to settle for whatever the company offers. Before you sign anything, speak with an employment lawyer. Many offer free initial consultations - where you can explain the circumstances, and they'll tell you if they think you have a legitimate case to seek - and receive - a better package.

Tenant's rights

If you live in a rental apartment, you should know that there are rules around what a landlord can and can't do. Rules vary by province but, generally, they must maintain a safe environment, notify you ahead of time before they enter the unit and, in many cases, there are limits on how much they can raise the rent each year. They also have to give you sufficient notice if they want to evict you so they can move in themselves, and they may have to compensate you for the inconvenience.

Check out the website of the landlord-tenant board in your province or territory to learn more about your rights as a tenant. And, if you think your landlord has violated the rules and regulations, contact them to set up a hearing.

Telecom user's rights

We rely on technology for an endless array of tasks, from entertainment and finding directions, to communicating with loved ones and getting our jobs done. So, it's a major inconvenience if the company that provides your phone, internet or television service doesn't deliver what you're paying for.

If you've contacted your service provider about a problem and they haven't resolved it, there's a national and impartial dispute resolution service you can turn to: The Commission for Complaints for Telecom-television Services. This organization helps service providers and customers resolve problems. It has the power to tell providers how to fix the problem, and often, to issue a credit or refund to the customer. Its services are available in English or French and are provided free of charge. Most complaints filed with the organization are resolved within 30 days.

Find more information at ccts-cprst.ca.

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5 tips to get action on a consumer complaint



(NC) We've all experienced bad service at some point. While we have our thresholds of what we're willing to tolerate, sometimes issues go beyond high prices or impolite customer service. If a company ignores their policies or doesn't follow the rules, by overcharging you on a bill or not giving you a refund you're owed, you may want to make a complaint. Here are some tips to make sure it's effective and you get what you're due.

Acknowledge your feelings

It's pretty normal to have a strong emotional reaction when you realize a company isn't playing fair and square with you. Take the time you need to vent, to feel that frustration or anger, before you take the next steps. While these feelings can be motivating, they can sometimes get in the way of effective problem-solving. Plus, no one wants to be that person screaming at the customer service representative.

Get organized

For any chance of a resolution, you need to be able to explain what the problem is. So, write down the concern to get it straight. Point to what policy, rule or aspect of an agreement has been violated beyond simply saying, “this company owes me money” or “I’m out a hundred bucks.” These details could be a reality check or provide important evidence to back up a complaint.

Start at the source

If it still seems like something might be off, contact the company. Most companies want to keep customers happy and maintain their service standards. While you might be tempted to start ranting about the company on social media, see if they might have a solution to your problem before looking for help anywhere else. You might be pleasantly surprised by their response.

Take notes

You should always document what happens when addressing an issue. Make detailed notes on any communications you have with the company, including the company’s response to your explanation of the problem. Save emails and take screenshots of any online messages. Keeping a detailed timeline of events will also provide a record of your interactions if you need to take the problem further.

Escalate to an ombudsman

If the company doesn’t take appropriate action to solve your problem, take your complaint to an organization that can help. Many sectors have a regulatory body or ombudsman to hold them accountable. For phone, internet and TV providers in Canada that’s the Commission for Complaints for Telecom-television Services.

This organization helps service providers and customers resolve problems. It has the power to tell providers how to fix the problem, and often, to issue a credit or refund to the customer. Its services are available in English or French and are provided free of charge. Most complaints filed with the organization are resolved within 30 days.

Find more information or get action on a complaint at ccts-cprst.ca.

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3 tips to get back money you’re owed



(NC) Nobody likes to leave money on the table. For those of us struggling with the rising cost of living and keeping up with bill payments, it’s really important to ensure we receive all that we’re owed.

Here are three ways you might be able to get some money back.

Submit product rebates

Many retailers and manufacturers include rebates on certain products to help boost sales. But, if the rebate isn’t automatically applied at the time of purchase, you need to submit it afterwards. It’s often worth taking the time to submit any rebates you’re owed, which usually only takes a few minutes of your time.

Similarly, when you’re at the grocery store and pick up an item that’s discounted for quick sale, check your receipt to make sure you received the proper credits.

File your tax return early

While it may sound counterintuitive, filing your tax return as soon as you can may really help. If you’re owed a return for overpaying on your taxes, the sooner you file your taxes, the sooner you’ll get that money back. The government also uses your tax filing information to determine if you’re eligible for a variety of rebates and other programs, including the Canada Carbon Rebate (formerly known as Climate action incentive payment) and the new Canadian Dental Care Plan.

Check for overbilling

In today's wired world, many of us have multiple digital devices that we use on a regular basis - cellphones, laptops, TVs and more. When we have an issue with these services, we need to have it fixed.

If you've contacted your phone, internet or TV provider because you were overcharged, your service wasn't working properly or because they didn't follow through with a promise they made, and they haven't resolved it, there's a national, independent and impartial dispute resolution service you can count on: the Commission for Complaints for Telecom-television Services, or CCTS.

This organization helps service providers and customers resolve problems. It also has the power to tell service providers how to fix the problem, and often, to issue a credit or refund to the customer. Its services are available in English or French and, as the industry ombudsman, it doesn't cost you anything. Most complaints filed with the organization are resolved within 30 days.

Find more information at ccts-cprst.ca.

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Why you should share your end-of-life wishes with your loved ones



(NC) Discussing death can be a challenging and sensitive topic for many Canadians. However, embracing and engaging in meaningful conversations around personal legacy and end-of-life wishes can help with the grieving process.

While a traditional or religious funeral service may be the right choice for some, it may not be the ideal option for others.

Increasingly, some people are choosing a "celebration of life" that centres on the impact and lasting legacy of the departed.

"Over 90 per cent of Canadians recognize the importance of sharing their end-of-life wishes with their loved ones," says Scott Lockwood, of Arbor Memorial funeral homes and cemeteries. "But less than half have spoken about them."

He adds, "While it is a sensitive topic, it is important to have these conversations while we can. Taking care of the details ahead of time provides comfort for your loved ones during a tough time."

Find out more about pre-planning a funeral at arbormemorial.ca.

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Food & Nutrition

What you might not know about Ontario's asparagus crop



(NC) Ontario farmers rely on a network of 20,000 seasonal and temporary foreign workers to harvest fresh produce, including the asparagus featured in this appetizer recipe from Foodland Ontario.

For about two months starting in early May, asparagus is cut, washed, sorted, graded, packed and shipped daily - and helping to make all that happen are farm workers like Errol Williams from Jamaica.

He's been coming to Ontario annually for more than a decade to work at a southern Ontario asparagus and watermelon farm. This has let him send his children to college: one of his daughters is now in law school, another is a teacher, and his son is a computer technician.

"In Jamaica, it's very tough. I came here to make life better for me and my family. I couldn't have helped them without this job," Williams says, adding that he's also been able to start his own business. "Canada is a wonderful country. From the day I stepped here, I love it."

International farm workers like Williams come to Ontario under the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program, or the agricultural stream of the federal government's Temporary Foreign Worker program.

Once here, government regulations mean these workers have the same employment-related rights and benefits as local workers doing the same work, and farm employers are subject to frequent federal, provincial and foreign government compliance inspections to ensure the rules are being followed.

Learn more about the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program at morethanamigrantworker.ca.

Sidebar:

Grilled Prosciutto and Asparagus Bundles

Prep time: 5 minutes

Cook time: 5 minutes

Makes: 12 servings

Ingredients:

- 36 thin spears fresh Ontario asparagus (about one bunch)
- Olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- 12 thin slices prosciutto

Directions:

1. Wash and break asparagus stalks where they snap easily, discard ends. Dry and toss with oil and season with salt and pepper. Bundle three spears together; wrap one piece of prosciutto around asparagus bundle. Repeat with remaining spears.
2. Place bundles on greased grill over medium to medium-high heat; grill, turning occasionally, until asparagus is bright green and tender and prosciutto is crisp, about 5 minutes. Drizzle bundles with olive oil and serve.

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Supplements vs. supplemented foods: Are they one and the same?



(NC) You'll find a lot of advice online about supplements. But have you heard of supplemented foods? Some supplements and supplemented foods can contain the same ingredients and therefore, should not be consumed together.

Supplemented foods are packaged foods or drinks with one or more supplemental ingredients added to them, such as caffeine, minerals like calcium, vitamins like vitamin C and amino acids like L-leucine. Some of these products carry cautions about consuming supplements and supplemented foods together.

To help you find these cautions easily, Health Canada introduced new regulations that require updated labels for supplemented foods. As of January 1st, 2026, all supplemented foods will be required to have these new labels, but you might start seeing them sooner.

Supplemented foods with cautions will carry an identifier with an exclamation mark and the words "Supplemented" and "Health Canada" on the front of the label, alerting you to read cautions written on the back or side of the product. An example of a caution is: "Do not eat or drink on the same day as any other supplemented foods or supplements with the same supplemental ingredients."

All supplemented foods will have a supplemented food facts table instead of a nutrition facts table. It includes the same nutrient information, with the addition of a "Supplemented with" section listing the type and amount of each supplemental ingredient.

Learn more about supplemented foods and their labels at canada.ca/supplemented-foods.

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Celebrating cultural traditions through food



(NC) In Canada, our rich background of various cultures creates a vibrant culinary landscape that extends beyond borders. From aromatic spices to exotic flavours, the love for ethnic and imported foods has woven its way into the hearts - and stomachs - of many Canadians.

Canadians embrace diverse flavours not just for gastronomic delight, but as a way of sharing cultures and traditions through food. This is especially true during holidays and events where communities gather to share customs and cuisines from Diwali to Lunar New Year, Ramadan to Hanukkah, and beyond.

During festive seasons, specialty stores, bustling markets and online retailers witness a surge in demand for imported spices, unique ingredients and traditional foods from around the globe. You, or someone you know, might even import your community's favourite festive ingredients and dishes.

Regardless of whether your food products are coming from around the corner or across the world, all food sold in Canada has to meet all necessary Canadian Food Inspection Agency regulations and be safe to eat.

These requirements apply to all businesses that import or prepare food for export or interprovincial trade. They keep our food system safe by focusing on prevention and allowing for the fast removal of unsafe food from the marketplace.

As importers need to meet the same food safety standards required of domestic manufacturers, consumers can safely share cultural traditions and explore delicious new cuisines.

Learn more at inspection.canada.ca.

Learn about Canada's new supplemented foods labels



(NC) Most of us are familiar with vitamin and mineral supplements. But did you know that there are foods and drinks on the market called “supplemented foods”?

These products have added ingredients, like vitamins, minerals and caffeine. Some can pose a risk to your health if you eat or drink too much of them or if they're consumed by someone who's pregnant or part of another vulnerable group.

Beginning in January 2026, all supplemented foods in Canada will be required to have a table listing the type and amount of any supplemental ingredient added to them, so that consumers can make informed choices.

Some labels will also show a warning symbol that includes an exclamation mark on the front, as a cue to look for cautions elsewhere on the label. That may tell you to limit how much of it you consume - or if it's not recommended for people under 14 years old.

These new labels are already on some foods. Learn more at canada.ca/supplementedfoods.

Health & Wellness

Top tips to avoid an accidental poisoning



(NC) When you hear the word poison, it may conjure up images of classic murder mysteries and detective stories. And yet unintentional poisonings are a leading cause of preventable injury and death in Canada. Medications, cannabis, household cleaning products like bleach, beauty products like nail polish remover and car supplies like windshield fluid are all common sources of unintentional poisonings.

Here are some ways you can help keep yourself and your family safe.

Stick to the original packaging

Keeping medications and products in their original packaging ensures the product is labelled correctly and helps you avoid dangerous mix-ups. You'll also have the usage and safety instructions right there on the container, so you don't have to guess on how to handle, store or dispose of the product.

Teach poison prevention

Little kids learn by putting things in their mouths. So, in addition to baby-proofing your home, be sure to talk to your older children about being safe. Teach them that hazard symbols mean "Do not touch." You don't have to scare them, but simple things like not referring to vitamins or medications as candies, which might make them more enticing to children, can help prevent unintentional poisonings. Also teach kids to ask a trusted adult before snacking on something they find laying around or in the outdoors, like wild berries or plants in your garden.

Store safely

Child-resistant caps on medications can make unintentional poisonings less common, so they serve a purpose. But they aren't fully childproof either. Tightly close medications, vitamins and household products like perfume or laundry detergent right away. Store these items out of reach, out of sight and locked away. If you can, keep products that could catch fire or give off harmful gases in a shed or garage not attached to your ventilation system.

Know who to call

Knowing who to call when a poisoning occurs can be lifesaving. The toll-free number for poison centres in most of Canada is 1-844 POISON-X. In Quebec, call 1-800-463-5060. Saving this number in your phone may save your back someday. Adding it to your emergency plan documents is also a good idea.

Find additional information on poison centres at infopoison.ca.

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How chemicals and pollutants get into our bodies



(NC) We do many things to take care of ourselves and those around us, like staying active, eating healthy and keeping our homes safe. Yet we are regularly exposed to chemicals and pollutants in air, food, water and in the products we use in our homes. Most of these chemicals are harmless, but others can pose a health risk if we don't learn how to protect ourselves. Here's what you need to know about how we are exposed to the chemicals around us.

Ingesting

Ingesting just means eating or drinking. Many chemicals can be found in both our food and water sources. As we eat and drink, we might swallow chemicals that can harm us. Children are also at risk of putting things in their mouths that aren't food or drink, including flakes of lead paint, colourful detergent pods and household cleaning supplies.

Inhaling

Inhalation is breathing in. The chemicals and pollutants we breathe in end up in our lungs and can end up in our blood. This can include anything from second-hand smoke or paint fumes, to odourless, tasteless chemicals like radon or carbon monoxide.

Absorption

Finally, chemicals and other pollutants can enter the body through absorption. That's when something comes in contact with your skin or eyes. These organs can be more sensitive to pollutants and may react more quickly than the rest of our bodies.

Risk factors

The impact a chemical or pollutant has on your health depends on many factors, including the type of substance you were exposed to, how long you were exposed and your age and general health. Some exposures may have an immediate impact, such as nausea and vomiting or a chemical burn on the skin. Others may have longer-term impacts such as cancer or organ damage.

Some groups of people are more likely to face serious harm including the very young or very old, and those who are pregnant or have certain pre-existing medical conditions.

If you suspect someone's ingested a toxic substance, seek medical attention or call Canada's new toll-free number immediately for advice: 1-844-POISON-X (1-844-764-7669). In Quebec, call 1-800-463-5060. Any information you have about the product and exposure time can help determine the best treatment.

Learn more about the pollutants in our daily lives and how to avoid them at canada.ca/healthy-home.

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Tips to keep your cool when the weather heats up



(NC) Many of us spend winter dreaming of sunny summer days ahead. However, the weather can become too hot to enjoy.

To make sure you can keep your cool when the weather heats up, here are some tips.

Check your air conditioner

If you have an air conditioner, make sure it's working properly before you need it. Turn it on for a test and schedule service if needed. This way, if there is a problem you can solve it before the first heat wave. If you don't have an air-conditioner, identify places close to

home where you can cool off on hot days, such as a library or community centre.

Have hot-weather recipes ready

Using your oven during a heat wave will add to the hot temperatures you're feeling. Rather than trying to come up with recipes when it's already too hot to think, plan some oven-free meals before the hot weather arrives. There are plenty of delicious options, including no-cook and cold dishes, as well as microwave-safe meals.

Revisit your closet

Many of us store our summer clothes out of the way for the winter. Dig them out in the springtime before the first heat wave so that you know they fit and where to find them when hot temperatures strike. Loose-fitting and light-coloured clothes made from breathable fabrics can help keep you cooler.

Brush up on safety steps

If you take medication or have a health condition, ask your health-care provider about how heat can affect you and follow their advice. If you do outdoor work or activities, ensure that you have a plan to accommodate extreme heat.

Arrange check-ins to reduce risk

Watch out for the early signs of heat illness, which include headaches, nausea or vomiting, dizziness or fainting, extreme thirst, and rapid breathing or heartbeat. These can rapidly evolve into life-threatening emergencies and affect your ability to reach out for help.

While everyone is at risk for heat illnesses, older adults, infants and young children, people experiencing homelessness and anyone with a chronic illness is at greater risk. Living alone or being socially isolated can also put people at great risk. Talk to your family, friends and neighbours to arrange regular check-ins with them during hot weather in case anyone needs support.

Find more information about how to prepare for summer heat at canada.ca/health.

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What everyone should know about essential oils

(NC) Scent is a powerful part of our human experience. Different aromas can take us down memory lane or transport us to a calming or energizing place. Essential oils often bring such scents to everyday items like candles, soaps and lotions. But there are some things you should know about them.

The meaning of essential

It may be easy to assume that essential oils are called that because they're essential to our health, like essential nutrients. But it actually means that they're the "essence" of something, specifically, a plant. Depending on the plant, oils may be extracted from the roots, flowers, leaves, bark or whatever part will give off the fragrance or flavour.

The safety of natural

Even though essential oils are natural substances, made directly from plants, that doesn't mean they are always safe for our health. In fact, many plants produce toxins to protect themselves against insects or animals, which can also harm us.

The ongoing research

Under Canada's Chemicals Management Plan, Health Canada has been evaluating the safety of essential oils. Lab studies have shown that some essential oils may affect important organs, hormones or the reproductive system when they're breathed in, put on the skin or eaten. Developing babies could be especially sensitive.

To assess if they might pose a health risk, Health Canada draws on information about how these oils are being used in products and by consumers and in what quantities. After considering this information, they determine if there is a potential risk to people in Canada. If an assessment determines that essential oils could be harmful at current levels of exposure, there could be new regulations or guidelines about how particular oils are used.

Find more information at canada.ca/healthy-home.

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Energize with caution: New labels on caffeinated energy drinks



(NC) How do you power through your late-night work or study sessions? Do you rely on caffeinated energy drinks, coffee or chocolate? These foods all contain caffeine, which you may want to limit. Health Canada recommends a daily intake of no more than 400 mg of caffeine for adults over 18. For reference, energy drinks can contain up to 180 mg of caffeine per can.

Supplemented foods, such as caffeinated energy drinks, are regulated by Health Canada. They require labels to help you know what ingredients like caffeine or taurine have been added to them.

Other examples of supplemented foods include snack bars and fruit drinks, which could be supplemented with:

- minerals such as calcium
- vitamins such as vitamin C
- amino acids such as L-leucine

As of January 1st, 2026, all supplemented foods will be required to have new labels, but some are already starting to appear on the market, so here's what you can expect to see.

All supplemented foods will show a supplemented food facts table instead of a nutrition facts table. There will be a "Supplemented with" section listing the type and amount of each supplemental ingredient, like caffeine.

Some of these foods will also carry a caution identifier, which includes an exclamation mark and the words "Supplemented" and "Health Canada" on the front, alerting you to read cautions written on the back or side of the product. An example of a caution is: "Do not drink more than 1 serving per day."

Whether for yourself or other family members, find more information at canada.ca/supplemented-foods.

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Word Count: 259 + 2 images

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Pregnant or breastfeeding? How to decode the new caution labels on some foods



(NC) Many of us want to make choices that support our health. Making informed decisions about food is a big part of that. Food labels are a commonly used tool to inform our decisions at the grocery store, and some of these labels will now look a little bit different.

Here's what you need to know.

Supplemented foods are foods or drinks with one or more supplemental ingredients added for reasons other than nutrition. These are different from fortified foods, which contain added ingredients for a nutritional purpose like adding folic acid to flour to help prevent brain and spine defects in babies.

Examples of supplemented foods can include snack bars, fruit drinks and carbonated beverages.

Supplemental ingredients can include:

- caffeine
- minerals such as calcium
- vitamins such as vitamin C
- amino acids such as L-leucine

Knowing how to recognize supplemented foods is especially important for people who are pregnant or breastfeeding and want to make the best choices for their baby. Unlike conventional foods, some supplemented foods may not be suitable

for eating or drinking as often or as much as we want. The reason for this is that some of these added ingredients can pose a risk if overconsumed by the general population or if consumed at all by certain people such as those who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Health Canada recently introduced regulations that require new labels for these foods. As of January 1st, 2026, all supplemented foods will be required to have these labels, but you might start seeing them sooner.

These products will have a supplemented food facts table, instead of a nutrition facts table, that includes a “Supplemented with” section listing all the supplemental ingredients added. Some will also carry a caution identifier on the front of the label. This tells us to turn to the back or side of the product for more detailed cautions, such as “Not recommended for pregnant or breastfeeding women” or “Do not drink on the same day as any other supplemented foods or supplements with the same supplemental ingredients.”

Find out more about supplemented foods and their new labels at canada.ca/supplemented-foods.

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What you need to know ahead of a heat wave



(NC) Like winter storms and wildfires, you may have noticed that heat waves have become more frequent and intense over the last few summers. This year, take steps to stay safe and prepare for the heat before it arrives.

Many heat deaths occur indoors. Make sure your air conditioner is working so that you're not stuck with a broken unit (and potentially a long wait for service) when the hot weather arrives.

If you don't have air conditioning, identify places where you can cool off on hot days.

Consider publicly available air-conditioned spaces such as shopping malls, libraries or community centres.

Also talk to your family, friends and neighbours about your plans for coping with a heat wave. Arrange to have regular check-ins with each other during hot weather in case anyone needs support.

Some medications can interfere with your body's ability to deal with heat. If you are taking medication or have a health condition, ask your health-care provider if it increases your risk for heat illnesses or worsens the side effects of your medication. Follow their advice.

Also learn to recognize the signs and symptoms of heat illness, including headaches, nausea or vomiting, dizziness or fainting, extreme thirst and rapid breathing or heartbeat. If you experience these symptoms, get to a cooler space and hydrate.

These symptoms can also rapidly evolve into life-threatening emergencies such as heat stroke. Signs of heat stroke include high body temperature, confusion, loss of consciousness and a lack of sweating during hot weather. Call 911 to seek help if you notice these in yourself or someone else.

Extreme heat can put everyone at risk for heat illnesses, especially in early summer when our bodies aren't used to the high temperatures. Older adults, infants and young children, people experiencing homelessness and anyone with a chronic illness such as breathing issues, mental illness or heart problems are at greater risk. A few early steps can make a big difference in protecting your health and the health of others from the heat.

Find more information on heat waves, heat illnesses and how to prepare at canada.ca/health.

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Home Buyer's Guide

Advice to help you pay off your mortgage faster



(NC) Looking for ways to pay off your mortgage faster? Even small steps over time can make a big difference in how long it takes you to become mortgage-free.

You'll typically have opportunities to make changes to your mortgage that can help. Some of them you can make at any point during your term, while others you can only make when you renew.

What you can do during your term

Speed up your regular payments: Depending on the terms of your mortgage, if you're currently making monthly payments, you might be able to switch to a more accelerated payment schedule. For instance, you could pay semi-monthly, biweekly or weekly instead. Making more frequent payments may help you pay off your principal sooner, which could potentially save you thousands of dollars in interest over the length of your mortgage.

Make a lump sum payment: Outside of regular payments, a lump sum payment is a one-time payment you make toward your mortgage principal. Depending on the terms of your mortgage, you may be able to take extra cash - such as from a tax refund, a bonus at work or an inheritance - and put that towards your mortgage principal. Speaking to a mortgage advisor can help you make the decision that best suits your needs.

Increase your regular payment amount: Another option is to increase your mortgage payment amounts, so you're paying off your principal faster.

What you can do when you renew

Consider your timing: At some financial institutions, including TD, if you're close to your mortgage maturity date (the end of your term), you can renew your closed mortgage up to 120 days before your maturity date without prepayment charges, and notably, you cannot renew into an open term mortgage if you currently have a closed mortgage.

It's important to understand the terms of your mortgage agreement before making any changes to your payments. Connect with a mortgage advisor to walk you through how to take advantage of flexible payment features and help you find ways to achieve your financial goals.

Find more tips on how to pay off your mortgage faster here.

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4 tips for helping your kids buy a home



(NC) With housing affordability shifting dramatically for a generation of Canadians, many hopeful homebuyers are turning to the "Bank of Mom and Dad" to help them secure their first home.

While it's natural for some parents to want to help their kids get a leg up in the real estate market, helping out with a deposit or down payment can represent a significant chunk of money out-of-pocket for parents.

If you are in a position to try and help your kids buy a home, whether that's with a loan or a gift of money, it's important to have a plan in place that's clearly communicated to your children.

Here's some advice on how to do just that:

Understand your own financial goals and needs

No matter how much you want to help your kids, you'll first want to make sure you aren't jeopardizing your own retirement or quality of life to do so.

Your income, when you plan to retire, how you want to spend your retirement, and whether you plan to make big purchases down the road, are all factors to consider.

If you plan on giving your kids money and need to sell investments or assets to make it happen, you'll also need to consider the timing and tax implications.

When to consider a gifted down payment

A "gifted down payment" is where the parent gifts their child a certain amount of money which is designated to go specifically to the down payment on a mortgage.

Typically, the person giving the gift must sign a letter stating explicitly that the money is a gift, not a loan, and that the money does not need to be repaid. The letter also includes details such as the date of the gift, the amount of money gifted and the relationship of the gift-giver to the recipient.

It's important to note that a gifted down payment is considered non-repayable. For example, if you give your child and their spouse a gifted down payment, and your child later gets divorced and sells their home, the equity in the home would be split equally with their ex-spouse.

If parents are looking to lend their children money toward a down-payment (that is, they would like it paid back), you could consider lending the money as a private loan or private mortgage, where a written agreement is drawn up by a lawyer.

Check in regularly with your financial goals

Speaking with someone from your financial institution, like a TD personal banker, and regularly updating your financial goals can help you look at the bigger picture and make a plan so that you're not losing sleep about your own future because you've helped your kids. These kinds of conversations are especially important as your financial needs change over time.

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What are the differences between fixed and variable-rate mortgages?



(NC) For many people, buying a home is the single biggest purchase they will ever make.

While the excitement of finding your dream home can be exhilarating, those feelings can sometimes give way to stress and confusion when it comes time to apply for a mortgage.

Whether you're a first-time homebuyer or are looking for a new place to call home, it's important to understand the terms of a mortgage agreement and how the mortgage process works.

To help you get started, here's a breakdown of some of the key terms you should know.

What are the differences between fixed and variable interest rates?

A key step towards homeownership is deciding what type of interest rate works best for you and your family.

You'll need to decide between a fixed-rate or a variable-rate mortgage. As part of this process, you may want to speak to your lender to help you decide which option works for your specific needs and how comfortable you are with the possibility that your interest rate could change during the term of your mortgage.

Fixed rate

For fixed-interest-rate mortgages the rate will not change over the course of a term, regardless of prime rate fluctuations. As your interest rate is locked in, fixed-rate mortgages offer the security of knowing your payments will not change over the term of your mortgage. However, you may see the impact of changes to rates when you renew.

Variable rate

The interest on a variable-interest-rate mortgage can fluctuate with changes to the lender's prime rate. However, the amount of each payment generally stays the same.

If the prime rate rises, then typically more of each payment will go towards paying the interest, and a smaller portion will go towards paying the outstanding balance. This means your payments may increase if you change your payment schedule during the term or at the time of renewal to get you back to your original repayment schedule (i.e., your amortization period).

While you're not required to make changes when your interest rate increases, you do have options, which may include making a lump-sum payment, increasing your payment amount or converting to a fixed-rate mortgage. Connecting with a mortgage specialist may help you to figure out what may work best for your unique needs.

When interest rates increase and the payment doesn't change, the payment amount may no longer cover the interest charged on a variable-interest-rate mortgage. This means you have passed the trigger rate.

After you pass the trigger rate on a variable interest rate mortgage, unpaid interest will start to increase the amount owing. At a certain point, you may reach what's called the trigger point, and you will then be required to adjust your payments, make a prepayment or convert to a fixed-rate mortgage.

Learn more about the different types of mortgages and options you have at td.com.

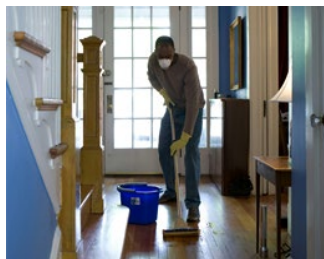
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Home - Interior

Give your home a healthy spring cleaning this year



(NC) The goal of spring cleaning might be to ensure you have a healthy home, but sometimes cleaning can expose you to chemicals and pollutants that could pose a risk to your health.

Here are some tips to ensure your next home cleaning is as healthy as possible.

1. Dust with a wet cloth

Dust and dust mites can cause allergic reactions and asthma attacks. Using a damp cloth or mop to remove dust and dirt wipes it up without spreading it around in the air for you to breathe in. Vacuuming regularly - weekly if you can - can reduce the amount of dust you have to deal with and make your space more comfortable. If possible, choose a vacuum with a high-efficiency particulate air filter to capture the smallest particles.

2. Ventilate

Household cleaning products like bleach or toilet cleaners can off-gas chemicals into the air, some of which can cause breathing problems, headaches, and irritation to the eyes, nose and throat. They don't always have a smell. Open windows and run the exhaust fan when cleaning your bathroom or kitchen with chemical products to keep your indoor air healthy.

3. Read and be aware

You should always read the labels on your cleaning supplies to check for any special handling instructions, such as wearing gloves or a mask. Always wash your hands thoroughly when you're done. Don't mix cleaning products, either, as some combinations, such as bleach and ammonia, can produce harmful gasses.

4. Store safely

When you're done using a particular product, always close the lid securely and put it away promptly. Store your cleaning products locked away out of sight and out of reach of children and pets. Kids and pets can be endlessly curious, and the littlest ones are often putting things in their mouths.

Keep products in their original packaging, even if you just have a little bit left to save. This helps avoid mishaps and ensures you have all the correct details on hand about how to safely use and dispose of them.

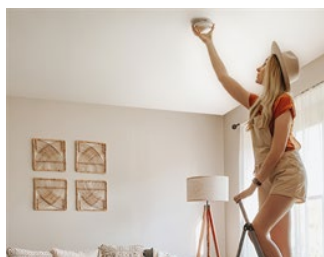
Find more information at canada.ca/healthy-home.

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4 spring home maintenance musts



(NC) It's no secret that the harsh winter elements can take a toll on your home. Once the ice thaws and the flowers begin to bloom, consider some simple spring projects to help prepare your home for the warmer weather.

Adjust your thermostat. Review and adjust your thermostat for springtime. With fluctuating temperatures, check the morning forecast and set it accordingly so you use less energy for heating or cooling while you're away from home. If you have a programmable thermostat, take advantage of its features to create an efficient cooling schedule. If you don't already have one, upgrade to a smart thermostat, like the Honeywell Home T9, which allows you to adjust your home temperature from anywhere and set different temperature schedules for various times of the day. You can also set the ideal temperature in the most-used rooms in the house.

Prep your HVAC system. Preparing your HVAC system for spring is crucial for optimal performance and energy efficiency. To help get your system ready for the warmer months, change your air filters, as they can accumulate dust and debris over time, and remember to inspect and clean your air vents and ducts for blockages. Consider scheduling a professional maintenance service to help identify and fix any potential problems before they happen.

Upgrade to 2-in-1 protection. Proper smoke and carbon monoxide alarm placement, maintenance and replacement are essential to keeping your home protected. Be sure to install alarms on every level, including the basement, and in every bedroom. Replace the batteries at least every six months, or make maintenance easier with a two-in-one smoke and carbon monoxide alarm, such as the First Alert 10-Year Battery Combination Alarm, which eliminates the need for battery replacement and late-night battery chirps for a decade.

Inspect for mould. Mould loves to grow in hard-to-reach places, and often in moist, dark environments. Be on the lookout for any discoloured, fuzzy or stained spots throughout your home and any damp, musty smelling areas. If you find mould growing, clean the patch with a bleach solution or contact a professional to safely remove it.

With just a few simple steps, you can help prepare your home for the warm weather ahead.

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How accessible is your home? 3 questions to ask



(NC) Thinking about how your home would function for visitors with different abilities might not be top of mind. However, considering where someone else might struggle around your home can help you discover ways that you or your family members could benefit from a more accessible space. Consider these three questions to get you started.

Could anyone navigate the entry?

An entry without steps is essential for an accessible home. If every entrance has stairs, you can make them safer and more accessible by adding sturdy railings on both sides of the steps.

You can also consider installing a ramp. If you plan to landscape, avoid creating unlevel or complex pathways. They can create problems for someone experiencing mobility challenges and could be confusing to someone living with a condition like dementia.

Is there room to manoeuvre inside?

Space to turn around a wheelchair or walker is an important part of making a home accessible. Popular open-plan layouts can facilitate this well, so you may have an easy win here already. If you don't have an open-plan space, doors and hallways should be at least 36 inches wide. Arranging furniture to keep walkways clear removes trip hazards for all.

Do you have a main-floor bathroom?

If climbing stairs is a challenge, a bathroom on the main floor will make the home safer and more comfortable for residents and guests alike. It's something to consider if the time comes for renovations.

Having grab bars near the toilet and shower area can also make a bathroom more user-friendly.

If you want to make your home more accessible for people of all ages and abilities, a health professional like an occupational therapist may be able to help. They have training to help people of all abilities continue doing their daily activities. Find more information at the College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario's website, coto.org/ot.

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Home - Safety

How worried should we be about asbestos?



(NC) Asbestos has been a hot topic on many home renovation TV shows for years. The contractor calls up the homeowner and says that all work must stop because they've discovered asbestos. But what is asbestos and how worried do you have to be? Here's what you need to know.

What is asbestos?

Before 1990, asbestos was used to insulate against cold temperatures, noise and fire. The mineral material makes products strong, long-lasting and fire-resistant. You can still find it in old building materials like siding, plaster, floor and ceiling tiles, drywall and caulking, as well as insulation around pipes and in walls. It was also used in auto parts such as clutches and brake pads.

Asbestos is no longer allowed in Canada because breathing in its tiny fibres can cause serious health issues, such as cancer and lung scarring. While asbestos isn't used anymore and new-build homes won't contain it, some situations merit a second thought.

Old home renovations

If you have an older home and you're planning to renovate, be prepared to budget for asbestos testing and abatement. Have a professional test before the project starts. If they find asbestos and recommend removal, hire a qualified asbestos specialist to remove it safely before your renos begin.

This is not a do-it-yourself job. If you disturb asbestos, say by drilling into walls or ripping out old tiles, the nearly invisible dust-like fibres will get into the air you breathe. A mask isn't enough protection since the fibres could circulate through your ventilation system.

Vermiculite insulation

Vermiculite-based insulation in walls or attics may contain asbestos. If your home has this type of insulation, don't disturb it or try to remove it. Instead, you can reduce your asbestos exposure by sealing the gaps around the attic hatch, baseboards, light fixtures, electrical outlets, and window and door frames. Avoid using an attic with this type of insulation for storage.

Note: There are usually no significant health risks if materials containing asbestos are tightly bound in products and in good condition, sealed behind walls and floorboards, isolated in an attic and left undisturbed.

Vehicle maintenance

If you have an old car or truck you cruise through your neighbourhood in or tinker around with, then you should take some care. Check with your parts supplier to find out if the old brake pads or clutch contain asbestos and consider getting the car serviced only by professionals; they can take proper precautions.

Find more information about asbestos and creating a safer home at canada.ca/healthy-home.

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4 tips to help protect your home and garden from wildfire



(NC) The garden is a place to express your creativity and beautify your curb appeal. It can also help keep you safe.

Across Canada there were more than 6,500 wildfires in 2023. You can help protect your home and family with your green thumb and these four tips from Co-operators Insurance.

1. **First up, is clean up:** Some gardeners like to delay cleaning the winter debris out of their gardens until late spring to give more time for friendly insects and critters to wake from their hibernation. But anyone living in a wildfire-prone area should limit this to wide-open, non-combustible areas away from structures. Ideally, your property should be cleaned of sticks and leaves, with grass trimmed to less than 10 cm (4 inches) by May and maintained through September.
2. **Zone out:** Defining separate outdoor zones for play and entertainment, as well as for vegetable and flower gardens, will help add functionality while keeping people, pets and plants safe. The most important zone for anyone who lives in a place at higher risk of wildfire is the area directly surrounding your home. Using fire-resistant materials for decks, patios and seating with pop-up-shade tents as well as moveable potted plants can go a long way to keeping your home safe while creating a beautiful and inviting space.
3. **Choose local:** When choosing plants, native species are always a great idea. Flowering plants like windflower, honeysuckle and coneflower are beautiful additions to any softscape. But, because they're native to Canada, there are added benefits: they need less maintenance, are a preferred food source for bees and other pollinators, and they are typically more drought resistant - meaning they're less likely to easily catch and spread fire.
4. **Look up:** Don't forget to look up when designing your backyard escape. Add dimension to your landscape by incorporating freestanding vertical gardens, creeping vines and hanging baskets in your garden's green zones. Keep trees and bushes, especially those that touch or overhang your home, trimmed back. While the ladder is out, make sure your eavestroughs and roof are clear of any debris. And while you're up there, look at your roof and repair any curling shingles. If it's time for a new roof, consider durable, fire-resistant materials and a simple design. These smart choices can even help lower your insurance premiums.

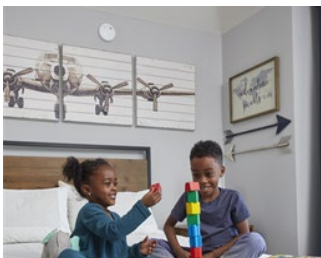
Find more information on how to protect your garden and home from fire at cooperators.ca.

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Fire up your home safety plans



(NC) In the busyness of daily life, it's easy to overlook the importance of practising home fire safety. Consider making the following tips routine to help ensure your home and family are prepared in the event of a fire or carbon monoxide (CO) emergency.

Test and maintain alarms. Maintaining your smoke and CO alarms is an important part of helping keep your home and family safe. However, of the Canadian residents who experienced a residential fire from 2015 to 2021, just one in three had a working smoke alarm in their home, according to Statistics Canada. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) recommends that alarms be installed on every level of your home, including the basement, and in every bedroom. Remember to test your alarms regularly, and if you're using battery-powered models, change the batteries at least every six months.

Upgrade to long-term alarms. To make maintaining your smoke and CO alarms easier, you can use combination 10-year sealed-battery devices, such as the First Alert 10-year battery smoke and carbon monoxide alarm. These two-in-one alarms eliminate late-night battery chirps as well as the need for battery replacements. They are easy to install and come equipped with a mounting bracket and installation kit.

Equip yourself with fire extinguishers. According to the NFPA, fire extinguishers should not only be placed on every level of your home, but also in easily accessible locations, such as under the kitchen sink. In the event of a fire emergency, assess the situation before reaching for your fire extinguisher. If the fire is small enough for you to handle, use the PASS technique to put the fire out: Pull the pin, Aim low, Squeeze the handle and Sweep from side to side. If the fire is too big or begins to spread, evacuate your home immediately and call 911.

Have a plan in place. Create and practise an emergency escape plan with every member of your household to help ensure everyone is prepared in the event of a fire. Identify two exits from each room, choose a designated meeting spot a safe distance away from your home, and practise at least twice a year so your safety plan remains top-of-mind.

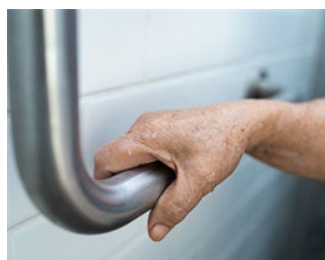
Find more home safety tips at firstalert.ca.

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5 dealbreakers if you're on the hunt for an accessible home



(NC) Buying a home is the biggest purchase most of us will ever make. There are many factors to weigh when deciding which one to put an offer on. If you or a loved one has mobility or cognitive limitations, there are even more things to consider. Here are five, and some potential fixes if your would-be dream home is missing some key elements.

Steep exterior steps

If someone with mobility issues can't even make it inside the front door, that's a major dealbreaker. The treads on any exterior stairway should be of uniform height and depth to avoid a tripping hazard, and secure railings should be on both sides of the stairway.

Potential fix: Is there an accessible side entrance that someone could use? If not, see if it is possible to install a ramp leading to the front door or an outdoor lift to get a walker or wheelchair safely to the entrance.

No washroom on the main floor

If climbing the stairs is a challenge, having a bathroom on the main floor will make the home safer and more comfortable for residents and guests alike.

Potential fix: If there isn't one already, is there room to add a small bathroom on the main floor? To keep costs down, locate it below a bathroom on the upper floor so you can connect to existing water and drain lines.

Multiple levels on the ground floor

Some home designs include two or three stairs to reach an elevated or sunken level off the main floor. These can be tripping hazards, particularly for someone with limited vision or mobility.

Potential fix: Would it be cost-effective to raise a sunken area to match the height of the main level? For short runs of interior stairs, consider whether there is space to install a portable or permanent ramp, or a chair lift.

No railings on stairways

Ideally, each stairway should have railings running along both sides. This helps people with balance problems or limited use of an arm or hand to gain a stable footing as they go up or down.

Potential fix: Provided that the stairway is wide enough, installing railings on both sides of the entire length of the stairs is a relatively simple and low-cost renovation.

No accessible bathing options

Many bathrooms have only a bathtub for bathing and showering. The problem with that is the height of the side of a tub can be a huge barrier for some people to step over.

Potential fix: Adding grab bars will provide extra hand support for stepping in and out of the tub. If you have the budget for renovating, you can install a curbless shower stall (that is, one that doesn't have a lip that you have to step over). Installing a walk-in tub, one that has a water-tight door and a seat, is also an option.

If you or a family member needs an accessible home, an occupational therapist can help you determine which renovations and workarounds can make a home suitable for all. Find more information about licensed occupational therapists at coto.org/ot.

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How to prepare your home for extreme heat



(NC) While longer days and warmer weather are sure signs of spring, they also mean that heat waves are coming, bringing high temperatures and, often, high humidity. These weather conditions pose health risks, especially indoors where many heat illnesses and deaths occur. This year, stay cool by preparing your home before the heat arrives.

Here are some things you can do.

Check your air conditioning

If you have an air conditioner, make sure that it's ready and working while the weather is still somewhat cool. If you don't have air conditioning, identify places where you can escape the heat for a few hours on hot days, such as a mall, library or community centre.

Learn about heat warnings

Make sure you know when a heat warning is in the forecast so that you can take steps to keep cool before you feel the worst of the heat. Local forecasts will typically include these warnings, and municipalities will often share them widely. You can also get official government weather forecasts and alerts on your phone through the WeatherCan app.

Plan for the sun

Planning to spend most of the summer hanging out or barbecuing outdoors? Make sure that you have a covering in place to block out the heat of direct sunlight, whether it's a tree, awning or umbrella.

When heading inside during hot weather you will also want to keep your home cool - make sure your blinds or curtains function properly to block out the sun.

Why go to the trouble?

Extreme heat and humidity pose serious health risks for everyone, especially in early summer when your body isn't used to them. They can cause heat illnesses like heat exhaustion or heat stroke, which can be deadly. Older adults, infants and young children, people who work outside and anyone with a chronic illness, mental illness, or heart and breathing problems are at greater risk. But early preparation can help you stay safe.

Find more information on heat waves, heat illnesses and how to prepare at canada.ca/health.

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What you don't know may hurt you



(NC) You might be surprised to know how many potentially toxic chemicals you likely have in your home. From bleach and colourful laundry detergent packets to household cleaners, paint and windshield washer fluid. Here's how to keep everyone at home safe.

Understand common household risks

You should always read the label on the product to make sure there are no special handling instructions, such as wearing gloves or a mask when using it. Always wash your hands thoroughly after using any chemicals.

Also, be aware that some products should never be mixed. If you accidentally mix bleach and ammonia, for example, you'll end up creating a poisonous gas.

Consider also choosing low-emission paints and varnishes, when possible, to help minimize off-gassing in your home.

You should also regularly inspect containers for signs of corrosion or leaking and dispose of any damaged packaging. Contact your municipality for the location and hours of the nearest hazardous waste disposal site.

Keep children safe

Children are most at risk for unintentional poisonings, in part because they're less likely to be able to read or understand the warning labels. They also have smaller, developing bodies that can be impacted by small doses.

As soon as they're old enough to understand the danger, you should teach kids what the various hazard signs mean on a package, including poison, explosive, corrosive and flammable.

Medicines should be stored in child-resistant packaging out of reach of young children. Remember to bring unused and expired prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications and natural health products to your local pharmacy for proper disposal.

Keep cleaning, laundry and painting supplies in a locked cupboard or storage room that children can't get into.

If you suspect someone's ingested a toxic substance, call the new toll-free number immediately for advice: 1-844-POISON-X (844-764-7669). In Quebec, call 1-800-463-5060.

Learn more about handling household chemicals safely at canada.ca/healthy-home.

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Think lead is no longer a worry? Think again



(NC) Some of you may remember a time when lead was used in a wide variety of consumer products, from paint and plumbing to gasoline. Then, as we learned more about the health risks it posed, including damage to the brain, nervous system and kidneys, especially to children, we started phasing lead out of most items.

And while gasoline is now "unleaded" and you won't find any lead in the paint on the shelves of your local building supply store, lead is still found in some older homes and in newer products that we bring into them.

This old house

Many of us treasure older homes for their character and charm. But many of these properties can also house lead, most commonly in old paint and plumbing.

A home built before 1960 will almost certainly have lead-based paint on the interior walls, unless it was removed during a complete renovation. Homes built between 1960 and 1990 may also have lead in the exterior paint. The lead gives it a sweet taste so if old paint is flaking off, children might eat it.

Lead was also commonly used in plumbing until it was banned in pipes in 1975 and when lead solder was prohibited in 1986.

Consumer alert

There are still some new products on the market that can contain lead, particularly if they are manufactured in a country that doesn't have the same level of regulations as Canada. These can include things like children's toys, costume jewellery, art supplies, the glazing on ceramics and lead ammunition for hunting.

Precautionary measures

Walls: If you're concerned your walls might have lead in the paint, you can buy a simple DIY kit to test for it. If the result is positive and the wall is in decent condition, you can paint or wallpaper over it to seal it in. If the walls are chipping, consult a professional about removal options.

Water: Most municipalities offer free testing kits to determine if you have lead in your water, and many have subsidized programs to help cover the cost of removing lead water mains. To keep yourself safe, run the water until it is cold before drinking or cooking with it, particularly in the morning when water has been sitting in the pipes overnight.

Dishware: Health Canada recommends that you don't serve food or drinks in leaded crystal containers or in glazed glass or ceramic dishes purchased outside of Canada.

You can also reduce the risk of ingestion by frequently dusting, vacuuming and mopping your home.

Children are more at risk for lead poisoning, in part because they have smaller developing bodies. But younger children are more likely to put random things in their mouth.

If you suspect your child - or anyone in your family - has ingested lead, seek medical attention immediately or call Canada's new toll-free number for advice: 1-844-POISON-X. In Quebec, call 1-800-463-5060.

Learn more at canada.ca/healthy-home.

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Do you know the potential hazards in your home, condo or apartment?



(NC) House, condo, apartment or whatever you call home, it's supposed to be a safe space for friends and family to gather. But our dwellings can also be home to things that can pose a risk to our health, especially if we don't know how to protect ourselves. Here are three things to be on the lookout for, and what to do about them.

Lead paint and plumbing

Houses built before 1991 may contain a variety of products contaminated with lead, most commonly paint and parts of the plumbing system. Ingesting lead can cause developmental issues in children, damage to the brain, nervous system and kidneys of people of all ages, and other problems.

Lead paint was used inside homes until 1960, and it's still on the walls of many older homes. The lead gives it a sweet taste so if old paint is flaking off, children might eat it. Lead was also found in exterior paint until 1990. If you think your home might be affected, there are testing kits and various ways to fix a positive result.

Lead was also commonly used in plumbing until it was banned in pipes in 1975 and when lead solder was prohibited in 1986. Most municipalities offer free or low-cost kits to test for the presence of lead in your home's water supply.

Radon

Radon is a radioactive gas that comes from the breakdown of uranium in the ground. Exposure to this gas is the number one cause of lung cancer in non-smokers. All homes have some radon in them. The only way to know how much is by testing. Testing is easy; you can purchase a DIY test kit or hire a professional to measure the radon levels in your home. If you find out that high levels are present, it can be fixed by a professional.

Household chemicals

Many of us stock a surprising number of chemicals in our homes. These can include everyday cleaning products, bleach and other stain removers in the laundry room and the windshield wiper fluid and antifreeze we rely on for safe driving.

Protect younger children by storing housecleaning, laundry and painting supplies in a locked cupboard or storage room that they can't get into.

Teach kids what the various hazard signs mean on a package, including poison, explosive, corrosive and flammable.

If someone has consumed a toxic substance, seek medical attention or call Canada's new toll-free number immediately for advice: 1-844-POISON-X (1-844-764-7669). In Quebec, call 1-800-463-5060.

Learn more about some of the risks you might have in your home at canada.ca/healthy-home.

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Parenting

Parents: Do you know what your teenagers are getting up to?



(NC) The teenage years are a mix of hormones, self-discovery and transitioning from childhood to adulthood. If you have teens - or soon-to-be teens - you may be feeling a sense of growing separation as they become more comfortable on their own.

The growing technology gap doesn't help that feeling, either. As any parent knows, if you need to figure out how to set up a new electronic device or debug an old one, ask a teenager. They've grown up surrounded by technology and are usually among the first to adopt new devices or tools.

They're also experts at using social media. Unfortunately, some social media content creators - or "influencers" - do questionable things to gain those all-important "likes" and "shares." And their followers often mimic their risky behaviour. For example, there's a social media challenge where people are dared to record and share videos of something dangerous happening near a moving train or on railroad tracks.

As past generations have learned, it doesn't take social media to inspire teens to take risks. Railway tracks have been seen as quick shortcuts for young people for years. There have also been reports of people climbing onto moving trains.

There are countless dangers around tracks and trains that can lead to injuries or even death. It endangers the risk-takers as well as passengers and crews on trains. Flying debris could injure bystanders or damage property, and sparks from sudden braking can start fires.

Any of these incidents can create delays which in turn can disrupt crucial supply chains. So, if anyone sees someone on or near train tracks or railway equipment, they should contact the authorities.

Parents who are concerned that their safety advice may fall on deaf ears might find that appealing to their teenagers' interests is more effective.

For example, if your child has shown an interest in protecting the environment, point out how passenger trains are a great way to reduce emissions, instead of people using individual cars.

Another option could be to explain how their part-time job relies on the supply chain, which might hit home for them.

Learn more about the security of Canada's railways at tc.canada.ca/en/rail-transportation.

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A guide for parents: What you need to know about supplemented foods



(NC) Are your kids consuming caffeinated energy drinks? Did you know Health Canada doesn't recommend that children under the age of 14 consume these or other supplemented foods and drinks with caffeine? There's more you need to know.

Supplemented foods are foods or drinks with one or more specific ingredients added to them. Examples of supplemented foods can include snack bars, fruit drinks and carbonated beverages. The supplemental ingredients can include:

- caffeine
- minerals such as calcium
- vitamins such as vitamin C
- amino acids such as L-leucine

These are different from fortified foods which contain added nutrients for nutritional purposes like adding vitamin D to milk to support bone health.

Some supplemented foods, such as caffeinated energy drinks, are not suitable for children because of the type or amount of supplemental ingredients (e.g., caffeine) added to them.

To help you navigate these products, Health Canada has introduced new regulations requiring updated labels for supplemented foods and drinks. As of January 1st, 2026, all these foods and drinks will be required to have new labels, but you might start seeing them sooner.

These products will have a supplemented food facts table, instead of a nutrition facts table, that includes a "Supplemented with" section listing all the supplemental ingredients added. Some will also carry a caution identifier on the front of the label. This tells consumers to check the back or side of the product for more detailed cautions, such as "Not recommended for those under 14 years old."

Learn more about supplemented foods at canada.ca/supplemented-foods.

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Pets

Fire safety for your four-legged friends



(NC) You've heard of childproofing, but have you heard of pet-proofing? The Canadian Animal Health Institute reports that nearly 60 per cent of Canadian households include at least one cat or dog. Whether you're already a pet owner or you're considering adding a Luna or a Max to your family this year, here are some tips to help ensure your home is safer for your whole family.

Set up a safe home:

- Avoid leaving candles unattended, as wagging tails and batting paws can accidentally knock them over. Consider switching to flameless candles for a safer, yet still calming, ambiance.
- Secure loose wires and run cords out of reach to help prevent electrical fires that can be caused by chewing.
- Install the recommended number of smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms. The National Fire Protection Association advises having alarms on every level of your home, including the basement, and in each bedroom. For added safety for both you and your pets, install combination alarms that protect against the threats of both smoke and carbon monoxide - such as the First Alert 10-year battery combination smoke and carbon monoxide alarm.
- Test alarms regularly, replacing batteries every six months, or opt for 10-year sealed battery alarms, which eliminate battery replacement and low-battery chirps for a decade.

Prepare for emergencies:

- Develop an emergency escape plan, assigning responsibility for each pet to specific family members. Practise the plan at least twice per year and decide on a meeting spot where the whole family knows to gather.
- When you're away from home, use a pet gate to keep animals in the main living area. This may make it easier for first responders to rescue your pet in the event of an emergency.
- Place pet-alert stickers near entrances to inform firefighters of pets inside, which may save valuable time during rescue operations.
- Make sure the information on your pet's identification tags is up to date and that they always have them on. If possible, microchip your pets for added peace of mind.

In the event of a home fire, never delay your escape or re-enter a burning building to rescue a pet. Instead, report missing pets to the fire department dispatchers.

Learn more home safety tips at firstalert.ca.

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3 semi-unusual pets and why people love them



(NC) From cuddly to rambunctious, cats and dogs are the most common pets. But, of course, they are not the only ones. Here are three other types of popular pets, why people love them and what everyone should know about them.

Birds

Often dubbed "mini dinosaurs" due to their evolutionary history, parrots, canaries and finches are cherished pets for their colourful plumage. Keeping outdoor birds like chickens is also becoming more popular. Fresh eggs anyone?

But birds are also susceptible to avian flu, which is highly contagious and has caused global outbreaks leading to mass disease and death in poultry. Importing a bird from a country other than the United States requires an import permit to help prevent foreign animal diseases such as avian flu from coming into Canada.

Outdoor birds, like chickens, are at risk of getting avian flu from wild birds. If you keep chickens in your backyard, they should be kept away from wild birds, and you should protect their food and water to ensure they don't get contaminated.

Reptiles

Many are drawn to the unique appeal of reptiles, which offer a departure from conventional pets in part due to being quiet and dander-free. But it's important to remember they're ultimately wild animals without the longstanding domestication history that cats and dogs have with humans. They can also carry salmonella, posing a risk to human health. To minimize this risk, always wash your hands thoroughly after handling them, avoid close contact and keep them out of kitchen areas. Providing a dedicated enclosure with carefully monitored temperature and humidity levels is crucial for their well-being.

Pigs

Rising in popularity, people adore pigs' curly tails, cute snouts and their friendly, playful personalities. They're also remarkably intelligent, capable of learning tricks and solving puzzles. But as with birds and reptiles, pigs also have major care needs.

Not only can they be extremely stubborn and destructive (think of a 200-pound toddler), they eat voraciously and need outdoor space to root around. Pigs also require important biosecurity measures to protect them against diseases like African swine fever (ASF). This viral illness cannot be transmitted to humans, and is not a food safety risk, but it is most often deadly for pigs.

Although Canada is ASF-free, it's important to keep pet or livestock pigs away from wild ones. The virus can spread through contact with their excretions, potentially contaminating shoes. Additionally, never give pigs meat scraps, as a small bit of the virus in contaminated meat can spread ASF.

Pets add plenty of joy and meaning to our lives but, before choosing any type of pet, be sure you thoroughly understand their needs so you can decide if they are a good fit.

Find more information about how to keep pigs safe from ASF at inspection.gc.ca/asf-biosecurity.

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Travel & Destinations

4 things you might not know about Canada's railways



(NC) At some point, most Canadians have taken a train trip somewhere. Maybe, it was to a different province to visit friends or family, or maybe it was sightseeing on a historic tourist train. Maybe it was simply heading downtown on a daily commute to work.

Many of us may take for granted how important railways are in our lives. Here are four things you might not know about them.

Historic significance

In the late 1800s, the drive to create a cross-country railroad was at the core of creating the nation known today as Canada. In fact, its completion was essential for British Columbia to join Confederation as Canada's sixth province.

The famous "last spike" of this railway was driven into a railroad tie on November 7, 1885, near Eagle Pass in the B.C. interior, connecting the country from coast to coast. It was just one of about 30 million iron spikes used to complete the line.

Countless new communities developed along railway lines across the continent, and the tracks opened up access to farmland, forests and other natural resources that literally helped build the country.

Economic impact

The fleet of freight trains traversing Canada is one of the economic engines driving the national economy. There are more than 2,000 locomotives that haul 50,000 freight cars across more than 40,000 km of railroad track in Canada. Trains carry nearly \$400 billion in goods to and from ports, trucking yards and major manufacturers and distribution outlets every year.

Canada's rail network is also closely connected with our North American free-trade partners, carrying goods back and forth between Canada, the U.S. and Mexico.

Plus, every year, millions of passengers travel on regional and interprovincial rail networks to get to work, visit family or go on holiday in Canada.

Various options

While shipping freight is by far the most common use of railways in Canada, there are other important and entertaining uses for Canadian tracks.

Many of Canada's historic steam trains are still in operation, taking tourists on scenic outings through forests, canyons and mountain passes. There are also modern luxury trains that take passengers through remote parts of the country you couldn't otherwise see.

And we can't overlook the many municipal commuter rail cars that people use daily, including subways, streetcars and light rapid rail lines.

Safety first

Given the significant role railways play in so many aspects of the economy, keeping the lines and equipment secure is a top priority for operators. Freight train companies employ their own private police services that have similar powers to other peace officers, such as local municipal or provincial forces.

There are also strict laws against trespassing on railway property, including around tracks and marshalling yards, or tampering with rail equipment. If you do see someone who shouldn't be on or near train tracks or railway equipment, contact the authorities immediately.

Learn more about the security of Canada's railways at tc.canada.ca/en/rail-transportation.

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Plan the perfect summer getaway



(NC) It can be exciting to plan how to spend your summer while there's still a chill in the air. While many of us crave summer fun, the hot weather can pose a serious risk to our health. But the heat doesn't have to ruin your summer break. Here are some planning tips to keep your time in the heat safe and comfortable.

Schedule smartly

Avoid scheduling outdoor activities during the hottest hours of the day, which is usually between 11 in the morning and three in the afternoon. Identify air-conditioned or cool spaces like museums or malls where you can spend time away from the heat or other weather conditions.

Follow the forecast

While planning your summer fun, try to keep tabs on the long-range weather forecast to get an idea of what to expect. That said, forecasts can change, so it's important to know where to get up-to-date information on local weather and air quality. It's also important to be prepared to adapt to unseasonable weather.

Dress wisely

Light-weight, light-coloured clothing made of breathable fabrics can help keep you cool. Keep this in mind when choosing your vacation outfits. Layering these pieces can help you stay comfortable when temperatures fluctuate.

Be aware

Make sure you understand what health risks you face so that you can plan accordingly and enjoy your time off to the fullest. This applies to your health in the heat, too. Hot temperatures pose serious health risks for everyone. They can lead to heat illnesses like heat stroke, which can be deadly. If you take medication or have a health condition, ask your health-care provider if heat is more dangerous for you and follow their recommendations.

These simple steps to prepare for hot and humid weather can help you stay healthy and enjoy your summer adventures.

Find more information on extreme heat, including tips to stay safe and signs of a heat illness, at canada.ca/health.

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Pack it up: Safety essentials for safe travels



(NC) When it comes to packing for a holiday, making room in your luggage for a few essential safety items can make all the difference in the event of an emergency.

Here are some necessities to prioritize on your packing list and help keep you and your family safe and prepared while away from home:

Emergency contact list: Start by making sure you have a written list of all the important details about your trip. This list should include names and phone numbers of where you will be staying; travel itineraries, including flight numbers; health information; and emergency contact details. If you lose or are unable to get to your phone, this information will be vital to have on hand.

Carbon monoxide alarm: The threat of carbon monoxide, known as CO, can easily be forgotten when planning a trip. CO is an odourless, invisible and poisonous gas that can be emitted from fuel-burning appliances, such as water heaters, stoves, furnaces and more. Because lodgings vary widely and may not have CO alarms, packing your own travel-friendly alarm, like the tabletop First Alert 10-year battery carbon monoxide alarm, can offer peace of mind, with no installation required once you get to your destination.

Portable charger: Travelling with a portable phone charger can help you keep your adventures going without losing contact with loved ones - or, in the event of an emergency, with first responders. An easy-to-use, pocket-size option allows you to stay connected, whether you're enjoying nature or exploring a foreign city.

Fire suppressant: If outdoor adventures like camping are on your agenda, a little preparation can go a long way to help keep you safe. If you plan on having a campfire, pack a compact, lightweight fire extinguishing device - and always make sure your fire is completely extinguished before leaving your campsite or going to bed.

Find more information about CO alarms and fire suppressants at firstalert.ca.

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3 tips for a smooth trip back to Canada



(NC) Whether you're returning from an international holiday or work-related travel, once you get to the airport or border crossing, you probably just want to get home. But, first, you need to pass through customs and immigration. Here are three tips to help you speed up the process next time.

Prefill your customs declaration

Instead of filling in your customs declaration when you get to the airport, you can complete the form up to 72 hours before arriving at select Canadian airports, which will give you access to express lanes. You'll need to confirm your declaration when you get to the airport kiosk.

Know your limits

If you're out of the country for more than 48 hours, you can bring back goods worth up to \$800 without paying any duty or taxes.

There are also limits on the quantity of certain products you can bring back, including food. Restrictions vary depending on the item and the country from which it originates. In addition, certain foods or products may not meet Canadian standards or regulations regarding ingredients, labelling or production practices.

What not to bring back to Canada

Some souvenirs and mementos from your travels may be prohibited or require permits because they are fully or partly made of endangered or threatened species. It's important to check before coming back to Canada. The country you're bringing these items from may also require a permit to export them.

Certain foods are also prohibited, including pork products. This is to protect Canada's pigs from African swine fever (ASF). It's a viral disease that cannot be transmitted to humans and is not a food safety risk, but it's almost always deadly for any type of pig. Leaving pork products in their country of origin is an important step in avoiding an outbreak of ASF that would have extreme impacts on Canadian producers and our economy.

Remember, if you have any prohibited food, plant or animal items in your luggage and you do not declare them, you can receive a penalty of up to \$1,300.

Learn more on the Canadian Food Inspection Agency website at canada.ca/CFIA-travel-guide.

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