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## Home Remedies: Clogged Drains



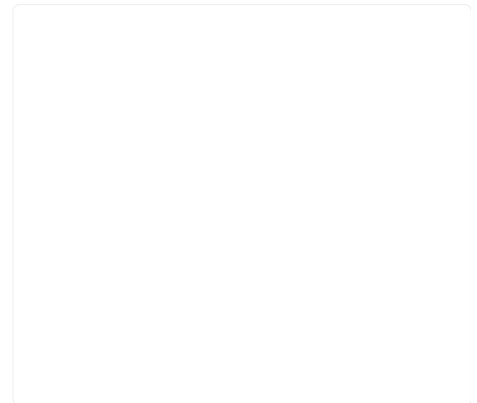
By [Gemma Alexander](#)

SEP 29, 2021 [drain clog](#), [home remedies](#)



The image of grandma's perfectly clean house has become even more attractive after a year of staying home. But chances are, your grandma never taught you how she did it. And when it comes to all those DIYs on the internet, well, you can't believe everything you read. When you're dealing with dust or dirty dishes, a little elbow grease can make up for ineffective homemade cleaning products. But if you've got a clogged drain, you need solutions that actually work.

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## Avoid FOG

You've probably heard your grandmother say it herself, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Ubiquitous garbage disposals and inexpensive drain cleaners have caused most of us to forget we need to take care of our pipes. FOG – fats, oils, and grease – from dairy products, meat, and sauces in the kitchen and from soaps and conditioners in the bathroom are the culprit in most drain clogs. Like cholesterol in your arteries, FOG residues can build up in pipes to clog drains because they are not water-soluble.

Wastewater utilities from [Virginia](#) to [California](#) recommend keeping FOG out of your drains.

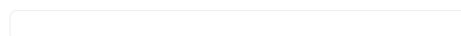
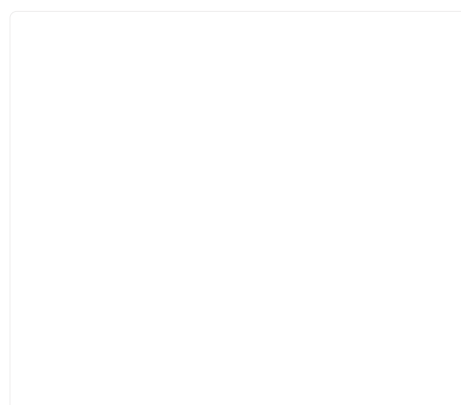
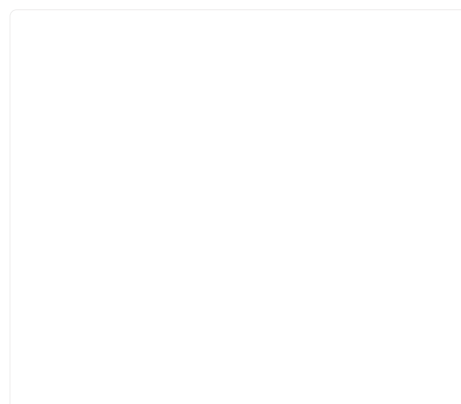
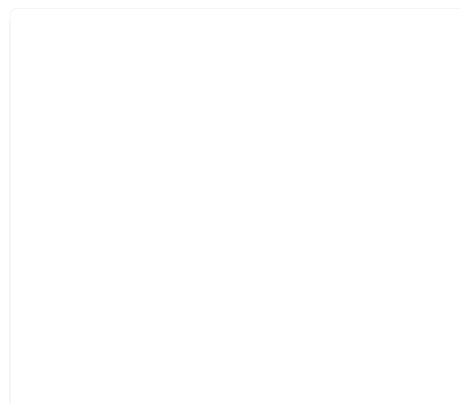
- Keep an empty metal can near the stove to collect cooking grease. Once it cools, throw it away or look for a [biofuels](#) facility that will accept used cooking oil for recycling.
- Wipe greasy pans and dishes with paper towels before washing. [Compost](#) the paper towels.
- Instead of using a garbage disposal, use a [sink strainer](#) and compost the food scraps.

To avoid nonFOG clogs, use a [hair trap](#) in the shower and clean it regularly. And do not treat your [toilet like a trash can](#). Clean the lint trap and dryer vent regularly to prevent lint buildup in drains.

## Mechanical Means

Attempt to physically clear clogs before you reach for chemical solutions. Learn the different [kinds of plungers](#) and how to use them properly, and keep both a [toilet plunger](#) and a [sink plunger](#) on hand.

If a plunger doesn't solve your problem, you may need to use an augur or a drain snake. As with plungers, there are many [types of augurs and snakes](#). [Augurs](#) are designed to break through and disperse clogs in toilets, while [snakes](#) are designed to grab and pull clogs to remove them. If you have a recurring problem, it is worth buying the right one.



## DIY Solutions

If you're contemplating pouring something down the drain, the sad news is that nontoxic, DIY solutions rarely work as advertised. [Vinegar and baking soda](#) are each excellent general-purpose cleaners, but [not together](#). Baking soda is a base while vinegar is an acid. Although very active bubbling might dislodge a clump of FOG, the fizz they produce when mixed is a chemical reaction between them and not the clog.

Pouring boiling water down the drain might melt solidified FOG and push it further down the drain. But FOG is not water-soluble, and the water will usually cool before it reaches the clog. If your pipes are plastic, they could be damaged by boiling water.

Detergent may be more effective. Commercial detergents are usually synthetic [surfactants](#). Surfactants chemically interact with surface molecules to make a substance more water-soluble, allowing dirt and grease to be washed down the drain. Homemade solutions like baking soda with salt, or lemon juice or vinegar with borax are also surfactants, but their strength is generally much less than detergent's.

## Drain Cleaners

There are several types of [commercial drain cleaners](#). Chemical cleaners include strong acids and bases (caustics) as well as oxidizers that can damage pipes and endanger health. Bioenzymatic drain cleaners rely on [biochemical reactions](#) in which strains of bacteria and/or nonliving biological enzymes "digest" FOG. Like many eco-friendly products, early iterations of enzyme cleaner were not as effective as conventional products, but performance has improved over time. Note that septic systems rely on enzymes and bacteria that can be harmed by drain cleaners – even mild enzyme cleaners. If you are on a septic system, make sure that any drain cleaner you buy is specially formulated for septic systems.

When possible, use a gel or foaming drain cleaner. These expand to clean the entire inner surface of the pipe while a liquid may only clear a passage through the clog. Whatever kind of cleaner you end up using, remember that more is not always better. Always follow the instructions on the bottle. And once you've cleared your drain, rather than using more drain cleaner as a preventative, remember to take care of your

pipes in the first place.

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By [Gemma Alexander](#)

Gemma Alexander has an M.S. in urban horticulture and a backyard filled with native plants. After working in a genetics laboratory and at a landfill, she now writes about the environment, the arts and family. See more of her writing [here](#).

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