

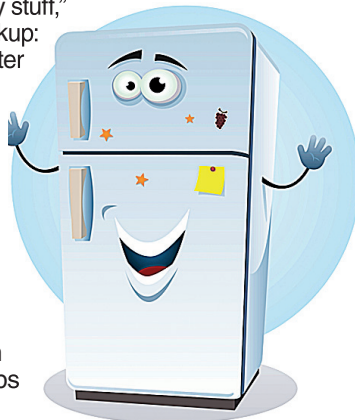
Easy appliance “tune-ups” that’ll save you a fortune!

Want to avoid having to pay for a new fridge, washing machine or oven? These easy pro tricks are guaranteed to keep them running perfectly years longer!

1 Keep your refrigerator humming . . . with the dollar bill trick!

An easy way to find out if your fridge is running at peak efficiency? “Feed” it a dollar bill! Just close the door on a dollar bill and give it a tug. If the dollar slips or pulls out easily, your fridge’s seal may not be tight enough. “Crumbs and debris that collect on the seal, especially on the bottom of the fridge, can cause cold air to leak out,” says Vernon Schmidt (RefrigDoc.com), author of *Appliance Handbook for Women: Simple Enough Even Men Can Understand*. How to avoid having to repair or replace the seal? “Just clean it with a little soap and water, then apply a thin layer of Vaseline around it to create a barrier against sticky stuff,” says Schmidt. Another quick fridge checkup: Place a food thermometer in a cup of water inside your fridge and leave it overnight. The temperature should read between 37°F to 40°F. If it doesn’t, just adjust the temperature to make sure your fridge runs as efficiently (and cost-effectively) as possible.

Tip! Clean the condenser coils at the bottom of the refrigerator twice a year, advises Schmidt. Popping the plate off the bottom—then vacuuming the coils to remove pet hair or dust that can make your fridge work extra hard—helps ensure your fridge’s longevity!



3 Prolong the life of microwaves and ovens . . . with easy cleaning!



“Place a bowl of water in your microwave and turn it on for a few minutes,” says Schmidt. “The steam will loosen any food that may have splattered onto the sides. It’s important to remove bits of food, because whenever the microwave turns on, those remnants continue to cook, and may burn into the walls.” And your oven? “Never use the self-cleaning setting for more than two hours,” says technician Shannon Vanness (MrHandyman.com). A self-cleaning oven runs so hot—700°F—that keeping it on longer can melt components!

2 Boost your dishwasher’s efficiency . . . by leaving dishes dirtier!

Want to repair-proof your dishwasher? Use less soap! “Add no more than one teaspoon,” says Schmidt. “Dishwasher soap is highly concentrated, and too much can cause damaging buildup to the washer’s rubber seals and pumps.” Also smart: “Don’t scrape off *all* the food from your plates before you load them!” Why? “Because soap needs something to break down,” he explains. “Food remnants trigger the soap to start agitating. If your dishes are too ‘clean,’ the soap won’t get sudsy.

Instead of scraping them, just give dishes a quick rinse to let your machine do its job as efficiently as possible.”

Tip! Stacking small dishware on the lower rack ensures water sprays out from the bottom of the machine unobstructed. Bigger items, like platters, can block the water, so place them higher in the dishwasher.



4 “Test” your washing machine . . . by running a soap-free cycle!

Too much detergent can lead to mildew. How to know if you’re overdoing it? Let your washer agitate for five minutes—without adding soap, says Schmidt. “After five minutes, if you see suds, there’s buildup. Just use less soap from now on.” Also smart? Run three empty cycles once every three months, says Vanness. “In the first cycle, pour 1/4 cup bleach in hot water. In the second, use 1/4 cup white vinegar; and in the third cycle, add nothing. The first two cycles clean the machine, while the third rinses it of the disinfectants.”



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