NO PREP

Household Maintenance Every Adult Should Know

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Includes: Student reading, case study, differentiated questions, teacher key

Name: Period: Date:

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Household maintenance is the least glamorous independent living skill and probably the highest paying one per hour invested. The reason is that home systems fail in a predictable sequence. A slow drip under a sink is a five dollar washer today, a warped cabinet floor in three months, and a subfloor replacement plus mold

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Household maintenance is the least glamorous independent living skill and probably the highest paying one per hour invested. The reason is that home systems fail in a predictable sequence. A slow drip under a sink is a five dollar washer today, a warped cabinet floor in three months, and a subfloor replacement plus mold remediation in a year. A furnace filter left in place all winter restricts airflow, forces the system to run longer, raises the utility bill every month, and shortens the life of equipment that costs thousands to replace. Nearly every expensive home repair began as an inexpensive one that nobody noticed or nobody wanted to deal with. Preventive maintenance is the practice of servicing things on a schedule rather than waiting for failure, and it works because most household systems announce their problems well before they quit. The skills involved are not difficult. What stops most young adults is not ability but unfamiliarity, since nobody is born knowing where a water shutoff valve lives. The goal is not to become a contractor. It is to handle the routine tasks, recognize the early symptoms of the serious ones, and know precisely where the line sits between what you can fix and what requires a licensed professional. Everything in this reading falls on one side of that line or the other, and knowing which side is itself the skill.

Find the Shutoffs Before You Need Them

The first thing to do in any new home is locate the emergency controls, and the time to do it is a calm afternoon rather than the moment water is spreading across a floor. The main water shutoff stops all water to the building and is usually found where the supply line enters, near the water heater, in a basement or utility closet, or in an exterior box at the street. Individual fixtures have their own shutoff valves, small oval or lever handles under sinks and behind toilets, and knowing those

exist turns an overflowing toilet from a catastrophe into an inconvenience. The electrical panel contains the circuit breakers, and every breaker should be labeled with the room or appliance it controls. A breaker that trips is doing its job, which is preventing an overloaded circuit from starting a fire, and the correct response is to reduce the load on that circuit and reset it. A breaker that trips repeatedly is reporting a real problem and needs an electrician rather than another reset. Gas service has a main shutoff at the meter, typically requiring a wrench, and anyone smelling gas should leave the building first and call from outside rather than investigating. The water heater has its own shutoff and a temperature setting that should sit around one hundred twenty degrees, which prevents scalding and reduces energy use. Photograph each location and keep the images on your phone.

The Calendar That Prevents Most Failures

Preventive maintenance works best as a schedule rather than a memory. Monthly tasks are short. Check the heating and cooling filter and replace it when it looks gray, typically every one to three months depending on pets and household size. Run water briefly in any unused drain to keep the trap from drying out and letting sewer gas in. Test smoke and carbon monoxide alarms with the test button. Seasonally, the list grows. Twice a year, replace alarm batteries unless the units are sealed ten year models, and vacuum the refrigerator condenser coils, which lowers energy use and extends compressor life. Before heating season, have the furnace serviced and check that vents are unobstructed. Before cooling season, clear debris from around the outdoor condenser unit. In fall, clean gutters so that winter water drains away from the foundation rather than into it, and disconnect and drain exterior hoses so an outdoor faucet does not freeze and split. Annually, flush several gallons from the water heater tank to reduce sediment, test the ground fault outlets in kitchens and bathrooms using their test and reset buttons, and clean the clothes dryer vent duct, which is a genuine fire hazard when lint accumulates. Inspect caulking around tubs and windows and reseal where it has cracked, because caulk is the cheapest waterproofing in the building. Written on a calendar, this is perhaps four hours a year. The reason to write it down rather than trust memory is that none of these tasks announce themselves. A filter does not beep, a gutter does not send a reminder, and a dryer vent gives no warning at all, so the calendar is doing the noticing that the equipment cannot do for you.

Repairs Worth Learning and Tools Worth Owning

A small set of repairs covers most of what actually goes wrong, and each one is learnable in an afternoon. A running toilet is usually a worn flapper, a part costing a few dollars that anyone can replace in ten minutes, and a toilet that runs continuously can waste a startling volume of water. A slow drain usually responds to a drain snake or removing and cleaning the trap, the curved pipe under the sink, and doing that beats chemical drain cleaners, which damage pipes and are dangerous if a plumber later works on standing chemicals. A dripping faucet is typically a worn washer or cartridge. Replacing a light switch or outlet is within reach for a careful person, but only with the breaker off and verified dead with a tester. Patching a small drywall hole with a patch kit and joint compound is a deposit saving skill for renters. A basic tool kit is inexpensive and should include a claw hammer, both screwdriver types, adjustable wrench, pliers, tape measure, level, utility knife, stud finder, plunger, drain snake, flashlight, and a cordless drill. Add a voltage tester if you touch anything electrical. What to never attempt is equally important. Gas lines, main electrical panel work, structural changes, roof work, and anything requiring a permit belong to licensed professionals, both because the risk is severe and because unpermitted work causes problems when a home is sold or an insurance claim is filed.

Renters Have a Different Job Entirely

Tenants and owners face the same systems with completely different responsibilities, and confusing the two costs money in both directions. In most rentals the landlord is responsible for major systems, meaning heating, plumbing, electrical, appliances that came with the unit, and structural components, under the habitability requirements that make a unit legally fit to live in. Tenants are generally responsible for routine upkeep such as replacing light bulbs and filters where the lease says so, keeping the unit clean and sanitary, and repairing damage they cause. The critical practice for a renter is submitting maintenance requests in writing, through a portal, email, or text, and keeping a copy. A verbal request creates no record, and if a small leak later becomes major damage, the written request is what establishes that the landlord was notified and when. Photograph the problem when you report it. Report promptly, since most leases obligate tenants to report issues and allowing damage to worsen through silence can shift responsibility onto the tenant. Know the emergency contact procedure before an emergency, and know that

some jurisdictions permit a repair and deduct remedy for genuine habitability failures, though the rules are strict and worth verifying locally before trying it. Renters should also still locate the shutoff valves, because a burst supply line under a sink at midnight does not wait for a maintenance department to open at nine. Keeping the emergency maintenance number saved in your phone rather than filed in a lease folder is the same idea, since the moment you need it is the moment you will not want to be searching a drawer for paperwork.

Key Information: Home Maintenance Basics

Detail	Information
Preventive Maintenance	Servicing systems on a schedule instead of waiting for a failure
Main Water Shutoff	Stops all water to the building, usually near the supply entry point
Tripped Breaker	A safety response to overload, not a defect, unless it repeats
Water Heater Setting	About one hundred twenty degrees to prevent scalding and save energy
Filter Replacement	Every one to three months depending on pets and household size
Dryer Vent Cleaning	Annual task removing lint that is a genuine fire hazard
Never DIY	Gas lines, main panel work, structural changes, and permitted jobs
Tenant Requirement	Submit maintenance requests in writing and keep a dated copy

Case Study: The Leak Under Rashid's Sink

Rashid noticed a small dark ring on the cabinet floor under his kitchen sink in September. He wiped it up and assumed something had spilled. In October he noticed it again and put a towel down. By late November the towel was damp every morning, the particleboard cabinet bottom had swollen and turned soft at the edges, and there was a smell he could not place. He texted his landlord for the first time on December second. The maintenance worker found a supply line fitting that had been weeping slowly for months, replaced a two dollar washer in fifteen minutes, and then told Rashid the cabinet floor would have to be cut out and replaced and that the smell was mildew in the wall behind it. The landlord's email says Rashid is responsible for the cabinet damage because his lease requires prompt reporting of leaks and he waited nearly three months. Rashid has no photographs and no written record before December.

1. Use the reading's description of how home problems progress to explain how a two dollar part became a cabinet replacement.

2. Explain what Rashid should have done in September, and why the reading says the written record matters as much as the repair.

Multiple Choice

1. According to the reading, what does a circuit breaker that trips once indicate?

    a) A ground fault outlet that has failed its safety test

    b) A wiring defect that requires an electrician

    c) A safety device doing its job against an overload

    d) A panel that has exceeded its service life

2. Which annual task does the reading identify as preventing a genuine fire hazard?

    a) Vacuuming the refrigerator condenser coils

    b) Resealing cracked caulk around tubs and windows

    c) Cleaning lint from the clothes dryer vent duct

    d) Flushing sediment from the water heater tank

3. Why does the reading warn against chemical drain cleaners?

    a) They damage pipes and endanger a later plumber

    b) They require a permit in most jurisdictions

    c) They work too slowly on a fully blocked drain

    d) They void most manufacturer appliance warranties

Matching

Write the letter of the correct definition on the line next to each term.

Term	Definition
1. ___ preventive maintenance	A) The curved pipe under a sink that blocks sewer gas and catches clogs
2. ___ shutoff valve	B) A tenant remedy allowed in some places for genuine habitability failures
3. ___ circuit breaker	C) A control that stops water flow to the whole building or one fixture
4. ___ trap	D) A device that cuts power to stop an overloaded circuit from overheating
5. ___ repair and deduct	E) Servicing household systems on a schedule rather than after a failure

Fill-in-the-Blank

1. Servicing systems on a schedule is _____ maintenance.

2. A water heater should be set near _____ degrees.

3. The curved pipe under a sink is called the _____.

Short Answer

Answer each question in 2-4 complete sentences.

1. Explain why the reading says knowing which side of the DIY line a task falls on is itself a skill.

_____

_____

_____

2. Why does the reading tell renters to locate shutoff valves even though repairs are the landlord's job?

3. Explain how a neglected furnace filter costs money in more than one way.