

10 Really Easy Ways to Unclog Drains



We all know the warning signs. The sink takes a little longer to drain. You begin to notice water pooling around your feet in the shower. And the odors. The strange, unpleasant odors. They're all signs that you may soon be facing a clogged drain. And then one day, boom. Your drain is blocked completely. It's something you need to deal with quickly, or face the wrath of a burst pipe or a useless bathroom.

So you remove the excess hair and gunk that has built up at the surface of the drain. And nothing happens. You try some liquid plumber. No good. Then, the plunger. But what happens when it doesn't come to the rescue? Here are 10 ways to deal with the blockages before resorting to that expensive emergency plumber.

1. The Bent Wire Hanger

Simple enough, but surprisingly effective. Take a regular wire coat hanger and straighten it out as best you can. Then, bend one end over to create a small hook. Push that past the drain cover and start fishing. You should be able to get all sorts of hair and nasty stuff out of the drain. Remember, you always want to be pulling gunk out, not pushing it further. When you've got as much out as you can, run the hot water, and it should clear things up nicely.

2. Baking Soda and Vinegar

Mix 1/3rd of a cup of baking soda with 1/3rd of a cup of vinegar in a measuring cup. It will fizz immediately, and you should waste no time pouring it down the clogged drain. The fizzing action will help to remove the gunk, hair, and grime that has built up in the pipe. Let it sit for one hour or even overnight if you can. Flush with hot water. Alternatively, get as much of the dry baking soda as you can down the drain first, then pour on the vinegar.

3. The Wet & Dry Vacuum

If you have a wet & dry shop vacuum, it can become a terrific tool to unclog drains. First, set it to vacuum liquids. Cover up the vent to prevent a mess. Then, create the tightest seal you can over the drain. You may want to get creative and adapt an old plunger head for this purpose. With the vacuum turned on its highest setting, it can be powerful enough to draw the clog up the pipe and into the vacuum bag. It doesn't always work, but it's worth a shot.

4. Boiling Water

Tips don't get any easier than this. Put the kettle on (or use the stove or microwave if you don't own a kettle) and boil up as much water as it will hold. Now pour it slowly down the drain in two to three stages, allowing the hot water to work for a several seconds in between each pour. This is usually the easiest and quickest way to unclog a drain. If there's any water left, congratulate yourself with a cup of tea.

5. Caustic Soda

Get some rubber gloves and eye protection. Caustic soda (also known as Sodium Hydroxide) can cause nasty chemical burns. You can pick some up from your local hardware store, but always use caution handling it. Pour 3/4 gallon of cold water into a mop bucket, and then add 3 cups of caustic soda. Stir it well with an old wooden spoon. It will begin to fizz and heat up. Pour it into the clogged drain and leave for 20-30 minutes, then flush the drain with boiling water. Repeat if necessary.

6. Cleaning the Pipe

There are some plumbing jobs that I won't do, but this one is easy. First, place an empty bucket underneath the U-shaped pipe (the trap) beneath the sink. The bucket will collect the water that will spill. Using a plumber's wrench, loosen the slip nuts at both ends of the pipe. You should be able to finish the operation by hand. When the trap is free, remove it and turn it upside down, emptying the contents into the bucket. You may also need to fish around inside it for debris, and do the same with

the pipes that were holding it. An old toothbrush is good for getting the tough gunk out. Rinse the trap with water and then put it all back together. In most cases, that will have done the trick.

7. The Drain Snake

This is a fairly low-tech piece of equipment that works wonders. It's basically a long flexible metal rope with a spiral of metal at the end. The following video shows you just what to do.

8. Salt and Baking Soda

Mix 1/2 cup of table salt with 1/2 cup of baking soda and pour down the blocked drain. Leave it for 10-20 minutes, then pour boiling water down. The salt, baking soda, and boiling water will produce a chemical reaction that should dissolve some of the nastiest blockages.

9. Dish Detergent

If your toilet is clogged, pour 1/4 cup of dish detergent in the bowl. Then boil some water. The dish soap will act as a lubricant and help break up any greasy residue. Then pour the hot water down, and get ready to start plunging. If the plunger doesn't cut it, rubber gloves may be the next option.

10. Baking Soda, Vinegar, Gravity, and Pressure

If your bath drain is clogged, mix up some of the baking soda/vinegar mentioned in tip two. Pour it down the drain, and then place the stopper over it. After 45-60 minutes, fill the bathtub with water. Then, remove the stopper. The pressure of 40-60 gallons of water should be enough to dislodge the blockage that has been loosened by the baking soda and vinegar. You could also try some plunging or the drain snake in conjunction with the weight of the water.