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TOP TIPS
CLEAN YOUR GYM KIT

FRESHEN UP YOUR BAG

Fight odours in gym bags by placing a few dryer sheets inside. Try Essential Waitrose Fresh Tumble Dryer Sheets (£1.80 for 40).

SWEAT STAINS

Prevention is better than cure. For old stains on cotton, soak clothing in an enzyme-based treatment (try Bio Tex stain-removing powder; £2, sainsburys.co.uk) then scrub the marks with a nail brush. Machine-wash with a biological detergent, adding stain remover to the load. If that fails, soak the garment for 30 minutes in a sink of cool water with 5-6tbsp of bicarbonate of soda. Wash again, then dry naturally.

WET TRAINERS

These will start to smell if you don't dry them out fast. For a quick fix, stuff with scrunched-up newspaper to speed up the process. Avoid drying near direct heat. Don't machine-wash your shoes unless the manufacturer says you can.

goodhousekeeping.co.uk/institute



READERS' CLINIC

WHAT'S THE BEST TYPE OF CHOPPING BOARD?

V Riley, Birmingham

Jacqui Vincett, via email
Black granite — hygienic, easy to clean, looks good!

Barry Higgs, via email
Chopping boards should be wooden, otherwise they will blunt your knives. Mine is bamboo: hard-wearing and easy to clean. I've owned it for years.

Annie Tatchell, via email
Wood and plastic: they have a bit of give and will not blunt/damage knives.

KL, via email
Wood has antibacterial properties. Glass is pretty, but slippery and noisy.

Future question How do you get pen marks off walls without smudging?

Send tips, tricks and questions to homehelp@sunday-times.co.uk. Advice is given without responsibility; readers' tips should not be considered expert advice



HOME HELP

Struggling with saggy sofas, or hot-water tank making a racket? Our experts have the answers

Q We live in one of 14 flats, leasehold, with a managing agent. One neighbour wants to install a lift. He says the disability act means we have to agree, and that he will pay. (There aren't any disability stickers on his car.) Is he right? His solicitor's letter suggests the two directors of the management company could be acting against the law because of the disability act. We're worried about liability and being stuck with a lift no one else wants. *Sam Woods, via email*

A The Equality Act 2010 places a number of duties on landlords and managers of property in England and Wales to avoid discriminating against disabled people. One of these is to make "reasonable adjustments". This duty extends only to changing how things are done (providing information in an accessible format, for example) and offering auxiliary aids (such as a hearing loop). It does not necessitate physical changes to the property.

Although part of the act requires a landlord to make reasonable adjustments to common parts, which might include adding a lift, this has not come into force. Some parts of acts never become law.

Review the disabled tenant's lease. There is a small chance it contains provisions that allow him to request or install a lift. If the lease allows for such alterations, and the tenant occupies the property as their main home, the Equality Act provides a procedure for him to request the landlord's consent. This cannot unreasonably be withheld; the landlord must show that there are valid grounds for any refusal. But this applies only to the tenant's premises: it would be rare for a lease to allow a tenant to make changes to parts of the building not let to him.

In short, it's highly unlikely that a tenant could use the Equality Act to have a lift installed in a block.

Ed Cracknell is a senior associate at Russell-Cooke Solicitors; russell-cooke.co.uk

Q My daughter has two sagging sofas, the legacy of two boisterous children jumping all over them. Is there anything she can do to restore them without having to buy new? *Patricia Ramsden, Northants*

A If the problem is the cushions, adding extra stuffing can make a big difference. Most cushion covers have a zip for easy removal of the cushions inside, but if these ones don't, carefully unpick one seam of the cover, remove the cushion and see what type of filling is inside. If there is just stuffing, add polyester fibrefill (£5-£10 a kilo on Amazon) to give the cushions more bounce.

If there is a cushion pad inside the covers, buy some quilt batting or wadding. You can wrap this round the cushion pad; spray some fabric adhesive (Stick and Stay; £6.99, crafterscompanion.co.uk) onto the cushion pad first to ensure that it stays in place. Then put the covers back on and re sew the seam. There should be room for the

PROBLEM OF THE WEEK
BIRDS ARE FOULING OUR CAR, BUT OUR NEIGHBOUR WON'T CUT HIS BRANCHES

Q Our neighbours have a large tree that overhangs our driveway. It attracts a lot of birds, which relentlessly defecate on our cars. It is an expensive nuisance: we must have our cars cleaned frequently. We have raised the issue with our neighbours, but they have refused to cut back the tree. What can we do? *Anonymous, Surrey*

A A tree belongs to the person on whose land it is legally grown, including any branches that overhang a neighbour's land. If branches encroach into your land, while the tree owner cannot be forced to take action, you are legally entitled to cut back those branches that overhang the boundary line of your land.

You should return any lopped branches to your neighbours, if they would like them, as prunings remain the property of the tree owner: ask whether they want the branches back before you dispose of them.

Before you get cutting, there are a few practical points to consider. You can only take the branches

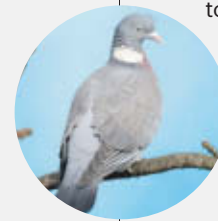
back to the boundary line, otherwise you may be held liable for damage to your neighbours' tree. If you hire someone to do the work, you will have to pay for this yourself; you have no right to ask your neighbour to stump up.

And you are not entitled to go onto your neighbours' land without their permission, as you would be trespassing. It is best to obtain written consent.

It is important to establish, before any work commences on the tree, that it does not lie within a conservation area and that it is not subject to a Tree Preservation Order. You can find this out by referring to your local authority, which will have a list of such orders. If one exists and you proceed, you could be guilty of an offence under Section 210 or 211 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

If you cannot cut back the branches without gaining access to your neighbours' land, and they will not grant this, you can take action against them in court for an order requiring access. If you then have to spend money on cleaning your cars, you can ask your neighbours to pay the costs, but court action can be expensive: think through the consequences of pursuing them in this way.

Simon Painter, partner and head of property litigation at Bircham Dyson Bell; bdb-law.co.uk



new material if the original filling is squashed.

If the problem is with the support part of the sofa underneath the cushions, try a "sofa saver": a fibre board that you put on top of the base before you put the cushions back (about £20 on Amazon). A piece of 10mm plywood cut to the size of the sofa base might do just as well to give extra support and a couple more years of use.

Wayne Perrey and Steph Bron, founders of thediydoers.com

Q We recently installed a new hot-water cylinder. Afterwards, we heard a horrendous foghorn sound whenever we turned on the hot water at either the kitchen or bathroom sink. The plumber came back and tinkered, but it still happens occasionally. *Mrs R Ashworth, via email*

A I am assuming you have a cylinder with a cold feed tank in the roof above it. My initial thought would be that the ball valve in the cold

tank is faulty; the rubber seal can stick a bit. This resonates with a squeal as water passes through to replace that coming out of any hot tap in the house.

If the cold tank was drained to change the hot cylinder (it almost certainly would have been), this might have disturbed the mechanism in the ball valve, particularly if it is an old one. As a first step, I'd go into the loft and listen to the cold tank while someone runs a hot tap to see if that's the source of the noise. If so, call the plumber back in to replace the ball valve — I charge about £70 to supply and fit one.

It could also be air trapped in the hot pipework near the cylinder. This can sometimes be backflushed using mains cold water fed into a hot tap, but needs to be done carefully by a professional. Doing so may take a minute or two or a lot more time, so the cost will depend on the plumber's hourly rate.

Joe Greaves, owner, Paveway Plumbing, Leicestershire; pavewayplumbing.co.uk