



# Home Tips®



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## Q & A

### How Do You Remove Tub Caulk?

*We want to remove the old caulking around our bathtub and recaulk but we have not found a good way to do this. Do you have any ideas?*

Removing old caulk probably would not make the list of the top 10 problems facing humanity, but it can be a tedious unpleasant chore. I recently spent fifteen minutes (it seemed like an hour) scraping and gouging at the caulk around my bathtub without getting very far. Then I smeared 3M Caulk Remover on the rest and took the rest of the afternoon off.

When I came back in the evening, the old caulk lifted off easily with a putty knife, leaving a smooth, clean surface for the new seal.

3M Caulk Remover cleans up with water, isn't sticky, and in most cases, won't irritate skin. You can get it at home centers and hardware stores for around \$6.00.

### Nail Pops?

*After moving into our new home, we've noticed small round bumps on some of the walls and ceilings. They appear to be nail heads sticking out of the wall. What can we do about these before we paint?*

What you see are called nail "pops" and are not a serious problem unless the drywall is sagging or loose. Nail pops occur when the wood that the nail is driven into expands and contracts or when the green lumber dries, pushing the nail out. This is fairly common in new construction or remodeling, but can usually be prevented by using drywall screws instead of nails.

To fix a nail pop, pound the nail back into place, just enough so you can leave a shallow dimple in the wall. Then take a new drywall nail and drive it in so that the head of the new nail will overlap the head of the old nail, holding it in place.

Once the nails are set, fill the little dimple you made with drywall compound, using a wide putty knife. Do not try to remove the old nail or you will end up damaging the drywall and having to do more extensive repairs. If you fix a nail pop in a textured ceiling, you will have to retexture that part of the ceiling.

### Toilet Won't Flush?

*Our toilet won't flush the solids out completely. Can you tell us what is wrong and how to remedy the situation?*

The first thing to check is whether enough water is coming out of the tank. Check the water level in the tank. It should be up to the water level mark on the inside of the tank. If not, adjust the water level by bending the metal rod that holds the ball float up a little. Also, if you put anything inside the tank (like a brick) to limit the amount of water in the tank, take it out. If you have a newer toilet that does not have a ball float, they usually have an adjustment on the valve itself.

Another cause of insufficient water might be that the flapper valve is closing too quickly. When you flush, the flapper valve should stay open until only an inch or two of water remains inside the tank. If it's closing too quickly, replace the flapper valve.

Next, check the trap at the bottom of the toilet, to see if it is blocked. Modern American toilets are not designed to handle items like plastic dinosaurs or diapers.

Plumbers use a tool called a "closet auger" (sometimes called a snake) to clean the bottom of the toilet. Closet augers are very simple to use. You stick the end of the wire in to the bottom of the toilet and turn the handle as you force the wire into the toilet. You may need to run the auger in and out a couple of times before you dislodge the object.

To check to make sure you have cleared the trap, lay about 20 feet of toilet paper on top of the water in the bowl and flush. If the paper flushes through easily, the obstruction is gone. If not, you should call a plumber. Closet augers rent for a few dollars at rental centers and sometimes at hardware stores.

Yet another problem that could cause a sluggish toilet is a plugged waterway between the tank and the bowl. When the water exits the tank, some of the water travels through a hollow area around the rim of the bowl through little holes in the rim. Sometimes these little holes become clogged with mineral deposits. To clear these holes, poke a coat hanger-sized wire up into the holes and work it around. This should break up any mineral deposits that are clogging the holes.

If none of the above seem to help, then the problem may be a clogged drain line. This can sometimes be corrected by removing the toilet completely and using the closet auger down the pipe to try and remove the blockage. This only works when the blockage is within a few feet of the toilet. If the blockage is further away, then it would be a good idea to call in a professional.

Remember, a new toilet only cost around \$100.00 and sometimes the aggravation is not worth the hassle.

