5 plumbing tips to protect your home's drains and pipes.

Homeownership comes with never-ending to-do lists. That's why preventive measures, like maintaining the health of your drains and pipes, often don't get checked off. But did you know keeping an eye on what's going down the drain and cleaning them even once a year can save you from significant damage and money down the road?

From kitchen sinks and showers to bathroom vanities and laundry tubs, we rely on our drains daily. Keep them all up and running with these five plumbing tips:

1. **Know what is acceptable to put down your drains and what is not.** Garbage disposals are time-saving tools, but people tend to overestimate what can be put down the drain for disposal. Things like coffee grounds, eggshells, and grease can damage your disposal and clog your pipes. A good rule for all household drains is to stop any larger or easily caught objects before they reach the drain. Investing in drain covers throughout your home can also help catch any objects you miss.

2. **Start with natural solutions.** When your drains are clogged, there are simple, at-home remedies that should be your first defense. One of the most effective solutions is vinegar and baking soda, which can clear or clean your drains and pipes when needed. When dealing with a drain issue, turn to these natural fixes before buying chemical solutions. Store-bought chemicals can lead to more problems or clogs instead of being a fix, so it's best to avoid them until it's absolutely necessary.

3. **Take part in preventive cleaning**. Instead of having to deal with a drain that no longer works, make general upkeep of your drains one of your semifrequent chores. Rinsing a couple tablespoons of dish soap with hot water down the drain or a small amount of bleach biweekly (or even once a month) can help maintain your pipe and drain health. To prolong your garbage disposal, place a few

ice cubes in it, run cold water, and turn the disposal on. These small tasks can make a huge difference for the future of your plumbing.

4. **Consider a yearly cleaning service.** While this may not be necessary every year, it can be a great way to ensure your drains and pipes are in the best shape. It is a good idea to have this done at least every couple of years to know the condition of your drains and pipes and work as preventive care. A formal annual cleaning goes the extra mile, but it can save you in the long run.

5. **Recognize when to call a professional.** Sometimes, there are drain and pipe issues that are too much for the average homeowner. If natural solutions and store-bought products are not fixing the issue, this could be a bigger problem than you thought. Now's the time to call a plumber with advanced experience so you can avoid any further damage to your home.

Even though maintaining drain and pipe health isn't at the top of everyone's list, it's an important household task. These five plumbing tips can help you stay ahead of disaster. If the worst does happen, make sure you know what your home coverage includes. A local, independent agent can help you better understand your policy and get the protection you need.