What's Really in "Natural" Gas?

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The name *natural gas* sounds clean and harmless, but the primary ingredient is methane. In fact, the natural gas used in most homes for cooking, water heating, and clothes drying is typically more than 95% methane.[1]

Methane doesn't just affect the climate—it also affects our health. It contributes to the formation of ground-level ozone, a harmful air pollutant that can trigger or worsen asthma and other breathing problems. Ozone exposure has also been linked to heart disease, stroke, and certain cancers.[2]

You may think you'd notice a gas leak because of its distinctive rotten-egg smell. That odor comes from mercaptan, a sulfur-containing chemical added to natural gas for safety. However, small methane leaks can still occur. Research has found that gas stoves can release methane even when they are turned off, often through small leaks in fittings, valves, or connections.[3] Because the added odorant may not always be noticeable at these low levels, methane can accumulate indoors over time, particularly in homes with poorly ventilated or ventless gas appliances.

While the EPA regulates some indoor air hazards, such as carbon monoxide and radon, there are currently no federal indoor standards for methane.

You can reduce your household exposure with a few simple habits:

- Always use a range hood or other ventilation when cooking with gas.
- Open a window before and after cooking to increase fresh airflow.
- Never use a gas oven to heat your home, and never operate a gas-powered generator indoors or near open windows.
- If your garage is attached to your home, turn off your vehicle immediately after parking—even with the garage door open.
- When possible, choose electric appliances such as a microwave, toaster oven, electric kettle, slow cooker, or induction cooktop instead of cooking with gas.

References

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2. Environmental Defense Fund. *How Methane Harms Our Health.* https://www.edf.org/how-methane-harms-our-health

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