

Wellness Advocate



FLU SEASON AHEAD

Quick Tips for Keeping Germs at Bay

The tiny organisms that can cause sicknesses like colds and flu lurk on just about every imaginable surface, from doorknobs to store shelves. The common cold is the main reason adults miss work and children stay home from school. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), adults average two to three colds each year, and kids have more than that. You probably already know the usual hangouts for germs, like bathroom door handles, but some germ hot spots are less obvious. Here are some of the places you might find them, along with how to stay nearly germ-free when you do.

Can I See a Menu?

We don't want to ruin your appetite, but restaurant menus have 100 times more bacteria than a toilet seat, says Charles Gerba, PhD, a microbiologist with the University of Arizona, better known as Dr. Germ. They're touched by tons, but only wiped down once a day, if that, and usually with a used rag. Instead of washing your hands before you sit down, scrub up after you order. And never lay your silverware on top of the menu.

Soap's Not Always Clean

Ironically, public soap pumps are a breeding ground for bacteria. Think about it: From the stall to the sink, there's no telling what your hands can pick up. So scrub for at least 20 seconds or carry hand sanitizer. And before you reach for that door handle, think about how many people don't wash after using the restroom. The CDC says only 31% of men and 65% of women do.

Money, Money, Money

ATM buttons, cash, and a revolving door of bank customers equals ick. In fact, the flu virus can live on a dollar bill for 17 days! But no one uses gloves or tissues to handle money. As for ATMs, companies hope to roll out touch screens with antimicrobial glass to combat cold and flu. For now though, your best defense is to press the buttons with a pen.

Grocery Games

Shopping cart handles can be downright gross. Turns out you're picking up more than just a loaf of bread. That handle can be swarming with up to 11 million microorganisms, including ones from raw meat. And just think about all the dirty diapers on that seat—the same one you're putting your produce on. A lot of grocery stores have antibacterial wipes handy, so use them. Another tip is to wash your hands thoroughly as soon as you get home from shopping.

Office Space

Even if you're the only one who uses your computer, it can still harbor germs and the potential for cold and flu. "Say you're outside talking to someone and they sneeze in your face," says Michael Zimring, MD, epidemiologist and director of the Center for Wilderness and Travel Medicine at Mercy Medical Center in Baltimore, "then you go back to your desk and sneeze on the computer keyboard—now your keyboard has germs." You can also bring cold and flu germs from other surfaces, like doors, back to your computer keyboard with your hands. To protect your workspace, use disinfecting wipes on all surfaces periodically.

Don't Touch that Remote

Change the channel with caution: A study by the University of Virginia found that television remote controls are likely resting places for rhinovirus, a germ that can cause the common cold. Disinfecting wipes can reduce the amount of germs on the remote control, Zimring says, and frequent hand-washing will reduce the likelihood that germs on your hands from the remote will make it into your body.

The Bottom Line? Washing your hands with soap and warm water, or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, is the best way to stop the spread of germs. In fact, the CDC cites handwashing as the "single most effective way to prevent the transmission of disease."

When the Going Gets Tough...

If something goes wrong, do you tend to bounce back or fall apart? When you have resilience, you rebound from a setback or challenge—a job loss, an illness, a disaster or the death of a loved one. If you lack resilience, you might dwell on problems, feel victimized, become overwhelmed or turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms such as substance abuse.

Resilience is the ability to roll with the punches. When stress, adversity or trauma strikes, you will still experience anger, grief and pain, but you're able to keep functioning—both physically and psychologically. However, resilience isn't about toughing it out, being stoic or going it alone. In fact, being able to reach out to others for support is a key component of being resilient.

If you'd like to become more resilient, consider these tips:

Get connected. Building strong, positive relationships with loved ones and friends can provide you with needed support and acceptance in both good times and bad. Establish other important connections by volunteering or joining a faith or spiritual community.

Make every day meaningful. Do something that gives you a sense of accomplishment and purpose every day. Set goals to help you look toward the future with meaning.

Take care of yourself. Tend to your own needs and feelings. Participate in activities and hobbies you enjoy. Include physical activity in your daily routine. Get plenty of sleep. Eat a healthy diet. Practice stress management and relaxation techniques, such as yoga, meditation, guided imagery, deep breathing or prayer.

When to seek professional advice:

Becoming more resilient takes time and practice. If you don't feel you're making progress—or you don't know where to start—consider talking to a mental health provider. With guidance, you can improve your resiliency and mental well-being.

(Article courtesy of the Mayo Clinic)



Pumpkin No Bake Energy Bites

Ingredients

8 oz. (about 1 packed cup) chopped dates	1/4 tsp. ground nutmeg
1/4 cup honey	Pinch of salt
1/4 cup pumpkin puree	1 cup old-fashioned oats (dry, not cooked)
1 Tbsp. chia seeds or flax seeds	1 cup toasted coconut flakes
1 tsp. ground cinnamon	1 cup toasted pepitas (pumpkin seeds)
1/2 tsp. ground ginger	

Directions

Combine the dates, honey, pumpkin puree, chia (or flax) seeds, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg and salt in a food processor and pulse until smooth and combined.

Transfer the mixture to a large bowl and stir in the oats, coconut flakes and pepitas until evenly combined. Cover and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes.

Once the mixture is cool (and easier to work with), use a spoon or cookie scoop to shape it into your desired size of energy balls. (Ours were about 1-inch in diameter.) Alternately, you can line a small baking pan with parchment paper, and press the mixture evenly into the pan, let it cool and then cut into bars.

Store covered in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks. (Storing them in the refrigerator especially helps the energy bites hold their shape.)

Nutrition Information per serving: (serving size: 2 "bites" | makes 16 bites) 159 calories | 11g fat | 4 g dietary fiber | 17g sugar | 3g protein | 23 g carbohydrates

(Recipe courtesy of Gimme Some Oven)

