# Healthy People Newsletter

**DECEMBER 2016**

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National Health Observances

December 2016

Safe Toys and Gifts Month

World AIDS Day (December 1)

National Handwashing Awareness Week
(December 6 – 12)
Avoiding Holiday Weight Gain

Here is my best advice for enjoying the holidays without sabotaging your waistline and your health.

1. Stay away from the appetite-stimulating “Great White Hazards”. This notorious group of easily digested carb foods including white flour products, white rice, white potatoes, and sugars/sweets make you hungrier. Holidays are already a dietary pitfall for most and these foods add insult to injury. Choose whole grains, beans, sweet potatoes, and winter squashes as much healthier alternatives to the starchy white stuff. Try bean salad instead of potato salad; brown rice over white rice; 100% whole grain crackers or breads over white bread; sweet potatoes or winter squash over white potatoes. And just say NO to the rolls and biscuits!

2. Fill your tummy up first with foods that have lots of bulk but minimal calories, i.e. the “big, yet skinny” fruits and veggies. Physical bulk (stuff) in the GI tract provides great appetite suppression. At holiday gatherings, go straight to the fruit and veggie platter first and really indulge; use high fat/oil-based dips sparingly. If available, make bean dips (hummus) your first choice. Eat a big tossed salad or a couple of servings of a veggie side dish before the rest of the meal. Fill at least half of your plate with fruits, veggies, and bean dishes before serving the rest of your meal.

3. Don’t let yourself get too hungry! It takes fewer calories to prevent marked hunger than it does to deal with it once it occurs!
   - Do not skip a meal earlier in the day to “save up” for the holiday feast. Eat a robust breakfast with an abundance of fiber and a nice dose of protein for better appetite control over the remainder of the day. Have a snack an hour before you arrive at a holiday gathering. My top snack choice would be a small handful of nuts along with a piece of fruit (apple) or fresh raw veggies (handful of carrots) dipped in hummus.

4. Make exercise a priority! It’s a fantastic safeguard against weight gain and helps compensate for holiday indulgences. It’s also the perfect tonic for the stress and
anxiety we all experience during the holiday season (many people binge when stressed). Taking a long walk right after a large holiday meal can aid in digestion and is fantastic for alleviating the bloat and fatigue that naturally ensues after eating too much.

5. **Be prudent in satisfying your sweet tooth.** Fresh fruit salad, a fruit-based dessert, or a piece of high quality dark chocolate would be my top dessert pick. If you prefer other goodies, be very mindful of your portions.

6. **Get your beauty rest!** Provocative new science reveals that sleep deprivation enhances appetite and increases cravings for high risk foods like sweets, chips, breads and pasta. Additionally, sleep deprivation zaps energy and enthusiasm for exercise. Strive for at least 7 hours of quality sleep the night prior to your holiday gatherings.

7. **Eat mindfully** – give every meal, every snack and every bite your undivided attention. Eat slowly and be conscious of how delicious your food tastes - savor the whole experience. Don’t linger over the buffet table or hover over the hors d’oeuvres nibbling as you engage in conversation. Get up from the table immediately after finishing your meal to reinforce that eating has come to an end. And pre-plate everything (meals, hors d’oeuvres, dessert etc). We tend to eat less if we can view it all before we start.

Enjoy the holidays and your health!
The holidays are a time to celebrate, give thanks, and reflect. They are also a time to pay special attention to your health. Give the gift of health and safety to yourself and others by following these holiday tips.

1. **Wash your hands often.**
   Keeping hands clean is one of the most important steps you can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others. Wash your hands with soap and clean running water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and clean water are not available, use an alcohol-based product.

2. **Stay warm.**
   Cold temperatures can cause serious health problems, especially in infants and older adults. Stay dry, and dress warmly in several layers of loose-fitting, tightly woven clothing. Check on children, the elderly and pets.

3. **Manage stress.**
   The holidays don’t need to take a toll on your health. Keep a check on over-commitment and over-spending. Balance work, home, and play. Get support from family and friends. Keep a relaxed and positive outlook. Get enough sleep.

4. **Travel safely.**
   Whether you’re traveling across town or around the world, help ensure your trip is safe. Don’t drink and drive, and don’t let someone else drink and drive. Wear a seat belt every time you drive or ride in a motor vehicle. Always buckle your child in the car using a child safety seat, booster seat, or seat belt according to his/her height, weight, and age. Get vaccinations if traveling out of the country.
5 Be smoke-free.
Avoid smoking and breathing other people’s smoke. If you smoke, quit today! Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW, or talk to your health care provider for help.

6 Get check-ups and vaccinations.
Exams and screenings can help find problems early or before they start. Vaccinations help prevent diseases and save lives. Schedule a visit with your health care provider for a yearly exam. Ask what vaccinations and tests you should get based on your age, lifestyle, travel plans, medical history, and family health history.

7 Watch the kids.
Children are at high risk for injuries. Keep a watchful eye on your kids. Keep potentially dangerous toys, food, drinks, household items, choking hazards (like coins and hard candy), and other objects out of kids’ reach. Learn how to provide early treatment for children who are choking. Develop and reinforce rules about acceptable and safe behaviors for all electronic media.

8 Prevent injuries.
Injuries from falls and fireworks often occur around the holidays. Use step stools instead of furniture when hanging decorations. Leave the fireworks to the professionals.

Most residential fires occur during the winter months. Keep candles away from children, pets, walkways, trees, and curtains. Never leave fireplaces, stoves, or candles unattended. Don’t use generators, grills, or other gasoline- or charcoal-burning devices inside your home or garage. Install a smoke detector and carbon monoxide detector in your home. Test and change the batteries regularly.

9 Handle and prepare food safely.
As you prepare holiday meals, keep you and your family safe from food-related illness. Wash hands and surfaces often. Avoid cross-contamination by keeping raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs (including their juices) away from ready-to-eat foods and eating surfaces. Cook foods to the proper temperature. Refrigerate promptly. Do not leave perishable foods out for more than two hours.

10 Eat healthy, and be active.
With balance and moderation, you can enjoy the holidays the healthy way. Choose more vegetables and fruit. Select just one or two of your favorites from the host of tempting foods. Find fun ways to stay active, such as dancing to your favorite holiday music. Be active for at least 2½ hours a week. Help kids and teens be active for at least 1 hour a day.

To learn more, including the holiday song The 12 Ways to Health, visit www.cdc.gov/family/holiday
The holidays are often filled with time-honored traditions that include some of our favorite meals and foods. As you celebrate, think of little changes you can make this holiday season to create healthier meals and active days.

1. **create MyPlate makeovers**

2. **enjoy all the food groups at your celebration**
   Prepare whole-grain crackers with hummus as an appetizer; add unsalted nuts and black beans to a green-leaf salad; include fresh fruit at the dessert table; use low-fat milk instead of heavy cream in your casseroles. Share healthier options during your holiday meal.

3. **make sure your protein is lean**
   Turkey; roast beef; fresh ham; beans; and some types of fish, such as cod or flounder, are lean protein choices. Trim fat before cooking meats. Go easy on the sauces and gravies—they can be high in saturated fat and sodium.

4. **cheers to good health**
   Quench your thirst with low-calorie options. Drink water with lemon or lime slices. Offer seltzer water with a splash of 100% fruit juice.

5. **bake healthier**
   Use recipes with unsweetened applesauce or mashed ripe bananas instead of butter. Try cutting the amount of sugar listed in recipes in half. Use spices to add flavor such as cinnamon, allspice, or nutmeg instead of salt.

6. **tweak the sweet**
   For dessert, try baked apples with cinnamon and a sprinkle of sugar instead of apple pie. Invite your guests to make their own parfait with colorful sliced fruit and low-fat yogurt.

7. **be the life of the party**
   Laugh, mingle, dance, and play games. Focus on fun and enjoy the company of others.

8. **make exercise a part of the fun**
   Make being active part of your holiday tradition. Have fun walking and talking with family and friends after a holiday meal. Give gifts that encourage others to practice healthy habits such as workout DVDs, running shoes, and reusable water bottles.

9. **enjoy leftovers**
   Create delicious new meals with your leftovers. Add turkey to soups or salads. Use extra veggies in omelets, sandwiches, or stews. The possibilities are endless!

10. **give to others**
    Spend time providing foods or preparing meals for those who may need a little help. Give food to a local food bank or volunteer to serve meals at a shelter during the holiday season.
1 IN 3 CHILDREN and adolescents, ages 2-19, are overweight or obese and nearly NONE meet healthy diet and physical activity recommendations.

An estimated 12.5 MILLION CHILDREN, ages 5 years or younger, spend 33 HOURS PER WEEK in CHILD CARE SETTINGS where they may CONSUME MOST OF THEIR DAILY CALORIES.

Obesity is linked to MORE CHRONIC CONDITIONS THAN:

- SMOKING
- POVERTY
- DRINKING

Increasing the RISK of more than 20 PREVENTABLE CONDITIONS, including sleep apnea, asthma, heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, osteoarthritis, high blood pressure and high cholesterol stroke.

Risk Factors

- Children in their early teens who are obese and who have high triglyceride levels have arteries similar to those of 45-year-olds.
- Obese children as young as age 3 show indicators for developing heart disease later in life.
- Children who are overweight from the ages of 7 to 13 may develop heart disease as early as age 25.
- Obese children are twice as likely to die before age 55 than their slimmer peers.

Obesity may be prevented by

- PHYSICAL ACTIVITY
- GOOD NUTRITION
- LESS SCREEN TIME
- MORE SLEEP

Children who EAT HEALTHY FOODS and GET DAILY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY have:

- FEWER SCHOOL ABSENCES
- HIGHER ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
- HIGHER SELF-ESTEEM
- FEWER BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS

Developmentally, birth to age five, is an important time to TEACH children to PREFER HEALTHY FOODS and DEVELOP GROSS MOTOR SKILLS, setting positive patterns and habits.

Nearly 1/2 of preschool-aged children don't get enough PHYSICAL ACTIVITY.

The COST of obesity in the United States is staggering, totaling about $147 billion.
LIFE IS NOT MERELY BEING ALIVE, BUT BEING WELL.

- MARCUS VALERIUS MARTIALIS
What Is Metabolic Syndrome?

Metabolic syndrome is a group of risk factors that raises risk of heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and other health problems. It is diagnosed when any three of the following five risk factors are present:

- High blood glucose (sugar)
- Low levels of HDL (“good”) cholesterol in the blood
- High levels of triglycerides in the blood
- Large waist circumference or “apple-shaped” body
- High blood pressure

Metabolic syndrome is a serious health condition.

Who has metabolic syndrome?

In recent years this syndrome has become much more common in the United States. About 34 percent of adult Americans are estimated to have it. Risk of developing metabolic syndrome increases as we age.

In the United States, the prevalence of metabolic syndrome is higher in non-Hispanic white men than Mexican-American and non-Hispanic black men. By contrast, it is more common in Mexican American women than non-Hispanic black or non-Hispanic white women.

Prevalence of metabolic syndrome is also increasing globally.

How is metabolic syndrome diagnosed?

The criteria to identify this syndrome are by the presence of three or more of these risk factors:

- Central obesity. This is measured by waist circumference:
  - More than 40 inches for men.
  - More than 35 inches for women.
- Fasting blood triglycerides are 150 mg/dL or more or taking medicine for high triglycerides.
- Low HDL cholesterol levels or taking medicine for low HDL cholesterol:
  - Men — Less than 40 mg/dL
  - Women — Less than 50 mg/dL
- Elevated blood pressure of 130/85 mm Hg or higher or taking medicine for high blood pressure.

(continued)
What Is Metabolic Syndrome?

- Fasting glucose (blood sugar) of 100 mg/dL or more or taking medicine for high blood glucose.

**How is metabolic syndrome treated?**

People who have the metabolic syndrome can reduce their risk for cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes by controlling risk factors. The best way is often for them to lose weight, eat a healthy diet and increase their physical activity.

Here are some important steps for patients and their doctors in managing the condition:

- Routinely monitor body weight (especially central obesity).
- Monitor blood glucose, lipoproteins and blood pressure.
- Treat individual risk factors (hyperlipidemia, high blood pressure and high blood glucose) according to established guidelines.
- Carefully choose high blood pressure drugs because different drugs have different effects on insulin sensitivity.

**How can I learn more?**

1. Call **1-800-AHA-USA1** (1-800-242-8721), or visit [heart.org](http://heart.org) to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
2. Sign up to get *Heart Insight*, a free magazine for heart patients and their families, at [heartinsight.org](http://heartinsight.org).
3. Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at [heart.org/supportnetwork](http://heart.org/supportnetwork).

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one. Visit [heart.org/answersbyheart](http://heart.org/answersbyheart) to learn more.
Meditation actually makes your mind calmer and more focused. A simple 10 or 15 minutes of meditation can help you overcome stress and find some inner peace and balance.

**SELF-CARE: RELAXATION TECHNIQUES**

Pain and stress can end up causing physical, mental or emotional issues. Often this physical or emotional pain significantly impacts our health, happiness and overall quality of life. Learning how to relax can lessen the impact that this pain has on your life.

**The Pain Cycle**

Perhaps the first step to healing ourselves is learning to better understand how our body reacts to and deals with stress and pain. Once pain occurs, whether from an injury or other source, your psychological reaction to it can have a strong effect on its intensity and duration. For some people, pain can become a vicious cycle: pain causes anxiety and tension, and anxiety and tension cause more pain. Many common health disorders, such as migraines, involve tension as a contributing source of the initial pain. By using relaxation techniques, one can release tension, greatly reduce certain types of pain and sometimes actually prevent the pain from occurring. Relaxation techniques, such as meditation and breathing exercises, are simple methods you can use to relax and break your pain cycle.

**Meditation as Medicine**

Meditation is an activity that can calm your mind and keep you focused on the present. In a meditative state, you can clear your mind of cluttered thoughts and memories. Studies even show meditation is effective in controlling anxiety, enhancing the immune system and reducing conditions such as high blood pressure, substance abuse and chronic pain. There are numerous kinds of meditative techniques, but concentrative, mindful and transcendental are the most common.

During **concentrative meditation** you focus your attention on a single sound, object or breathing pattern to bring about a calm, tranquil mind.

During **mindful meditation**, you keep your mind aware, but you do not react to sensations, feelings or images going on around you.

During **transcendental meditation**, you put your body at full rest but keep your mind fully alert, bringing about a deep state of relaxation.

**Benefits of Better Breathing**

Breathing is not only an important part of the meditative process, but used independently can be another effective self-help technique. Shallow or poor breathing contributes to many health disorders as well. Even though breathing is an automatic response, there are times when mentally adjusting the way we breathe can benefit our health and sense of well-being. For example, breathing deeply from your abdomen rather than your chest increases your oxygen intake. Shallow breathing inhibits the release of carbon dioxide from your body, creating an imbalance that can contribute to poor health. By practicing proper breathing techniques, you can increase your lung capacity and energy levels, speed the healing process of many disorders, and relieve anxiety, insomnia and stress.
Healthy Cream Spinach
Serves 4 plus

Cream spinach is a quintessential comfort food for me and this recipe is definitely one that comes with all the pleasure and no guilt. To the contrary, this recipe is so healthy I encourage you to get seconds!

Ingredients

- 1 - 16 oz. package chopped frozen spinach. (I prefer organic)
- 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 medium to large yellow onion, diced
- 1/2 cup crumbled feta cheese
- 1/2 cup plain non-fat or low-fat Greek-style yogurt
- 1/4 tsp nutmeg

Directions

Thaw the spinach in the microwave to about room temperature. With clean hands, squeeze out excess water from the spinach and place it aside in a bowl or on a plate. Sauté the onions in the olive oil until soft. Add the spinach and remaining ingredients to the skillet and stir over low heat until the cheese has melted and it develops somewhat of a creamy consistency.

Source: www.drannwellness.com
Does Exercise Really Help Bones?

It has long been common wisdom that weight-bearing exercise helps improve bone health. That’s why virtually the entire medical establishment recommends such exercise for people of all ages, from youth to old age. So it’s no surprise that an article in the New York Times entitled “Exercise Is Not the Path to Strong Bones” generated lots of buzz, lots of traffic to the Times site, and lots of dismay among people who doggedly exercise at least in part to help keep their bones strong. It was written by Gina Kolata, an ace science reporter and “self-proclaimed exercise addict.”

The gist of her article was that exercise’s effect on bone is minuscule and “too small to be clinically significant.” Kolata tried to clarify some of her points in a follow-up article, “A Second Look at a ‘Misconception’ on Exercise and Bones,” which undoubtedly left many readers still bewildered about what to do. In particular, should middle-aged and older people who are worried about osteoporosis and bone fractures skip the weights and hang up their exercise shoes?

Here’s what Kolata got right and what she got wrong. We include some comments by noted bone researcher Dr. Bess Dawson-Hughes, director of the Bone Metabolism Laboratory at Tufts University, whom we asked about Kolata’s articles.

What Kolata got right
• Changes in bone mineral density (BMD) resulting from weight-bearing exercise are small in middle-aged and older adults. The most common way to assess bone is via BMD, measured by a special X-ray (DEXA). As seen in a study in the Journal of Bone and Mineral Metabolism in 2004, postmenopausal women with osteopenia or osteoporosis who undertook a walking program four hours a week for a year had just a 2 percent increase in BMD in the spine. That’s typical of what such studies have found.

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Keep in mind that most gains in bone strength from exercise and diet occur during childhood and adolescence, when bones are still growing and developing. Bone density peaks in young adulthood and then starts to decline in middle age, usually earlier in women than in men. The trick is to slow this loss, or possibly even halt or reverse it somewhat.

• The decrease in fracture risk resulting from exercise may largely be the result of stronger muscles, rather than actually affecting the bones themselves. Exercise not only strengthens muscles but also improves balance and the ability to recover from a stumble, which can all reduce the risk of falls and resulting fractures. This is important, since with age comes a decline in both muscle strength and balance. A study in the European Review of Aging and Physical Activity in 2007 found that regular exercise can preserve proprioception (the sense of your body's position in space) and reduce the risk of falls. According to Dr. Dawson-Hughes, “I don’t like the dismissive tone she [Kolata] has, so I would indicate that, in addition to the fall risk reduction, the BMD and bone quality improvements seen with exercise are expected to contribute to the skeletal benefits of exercise.”

• Not all weight-bearing exercise is equally good for bone density—casual walking, for instance, won’t do much. It generally takes high-impact weight-bearing as well as strength training for both the upper and lower body to gain measurable bone strength. (The benefit is site-specific, so that when you run, the bone growth occurs primarily in your legs; when you play tennis, more occurs in your dominant arm.) Brisk walking is good for aerobic fitness as well as muscle endurance and balance, but bones respond better to heavy loads, as when jumping or lifting weights.

What Kolata got wrong
• The small changes in BMD resulting from exercise are clinically significant. “Kolata assumed that a 1 to 1.5 percent difference in BMD between exercise and placebo groups over a year is all you get if you continue exercising,” says Dr. Dawson-Hughes. If people continue to exercise, gains are likely to continue to accrue. And even small changes in BMD can mean a lot. A 10 percent increase in BMD (more than what most osteoporosis drugs accomplish) would result in an estimated 50 percent reduction in fracture risk, according to Dr. Dawson-Hughes. If it were linear, and we can assume it is, a 2 percent increase in BMD would lead to 10 percent lower fracture risk. “For a lifestyle change, 10 percent is not nothing.”

The authors of a 2007 study in the journal Bone noted that small improvements in bone from exercise can lead to big gains in bone strength because it largely occurs in parts of the bone where the strain is greatest. And this is the case even when there’s no increase in BMD. It’s also important to note that while exercisers may boost their BMD only slightly, at least they are not losing more, which would otherwise be expected.

• Exercise improves bone quality, which Kolata just glossed over, calling this a “mysterious property.” Bone strength depends not just on bone quantity, as measured by BMD, but on bone quality and structure, including the microarchitecture of bone, size of the mineral crystals, and quality of collagen (connective tissue), none of which are seen by DEXA. There hasn’t been a lot of research on exercise and bone quality, but some insight is provided by the above-mentioned study in Bone, which looked at women (ages 35 to 40) who did high-impact exercise for a year. They had a significant increase in the circumference of
the femur (thigh bone), with the most active women experiencing a small but significant improvement in measures of bone quality that can affect bone strength.

More recently, an interesting study in the Journal of Bone and Mineral Research in 2015 had men, ages 65 and older, hop on the same leg for two minutes every day for a year; the other leg served as the control. The result was a significant increase in bone mineral content in parts of the hip bone, including the thinnest area most likely to fracture in a fall—but only on the side of the hopping leg. According to the researchers, such localized bone changes could increase bone strength more than increases in BMD and may explain why people who exercise have a lower risk of fractures. Using BMD to assess bone health underestimates other changes in bone strength that occur with exercise.

In other words, you don’t have to build a large quantity of bone to improve the quality of bone and make it more resistant to fracture. “The arrangement of minerals in bone is hugely important,” says Dr. Dawson-Hughes. “Most of the measures of bone quality are fairly new. We don’t yet have much data from randomized trials in humans. But to claim no effect of exercise on bone quality or that we don’t know about bone quality is to be overly pessimistic about an area of research that’s active and exciting.”

Bottom line: Don’t be disillusioned about exercise as a way to help keep bones healthy. Just remember that it’s important to include some moderate-to-intense strength training and at least short bursts of high-impact activities like hopping or jumping jacks (for advice, see New Tricks for Old Bones). It’s vital to keep exercising, since bone loss will continue when you stop. And don’t forget other bone-health steps, such as consuming adequate calcium and vitamin D (the American Geriatrics Society recommends at least 800 IU of D a day for people at increased risk for falls) as well as lots of plant-based foods, which contain other bone-building nutrients. Don’t smoke and don’t drink more than a moderate amount of alcohol. Even if you follow every possible bone-friendly step, at age 70 your bones won’t be as strong as at age 20. But every little bit helps when it comes to bone health.
About the Buzz:

Can Snacking Help You Lose Weight?

What They’re Saying:
The frequency of snacking continues to rise and snack foods are having an increasingly high impact on individuals’ caloric intake – either positively or negatively, depending on their snacking behavior.

What We Know:
Many nutrition experts now regularly recommend that rather than rely on 2-3 large meals, people eat smaller portions of food, including healthy snacks, throughout the day to aid weight loss. Snacking has become so common that it is now often referred to as the “fourth meal” since the practice continues to contribute a major portion of daily nutrients.

What the Research Says:
Snacking accounts for 24% of the average individual’s daily calories, with 97% of adults snacking at least once per day. Surveys of snackers show that those who snack more tend to eat more fruits and vegetables. The issue is that high frequency snackers also tend to eat more overall, including more calories from solid fats and added sugars. Additionally, despite frequent snackers eating more fruits and vegetables overall, the majority of both men and women are still not eating enough produce items to meet recommended requirements. While snacking on healthful fruits and vegetables can help promote weight loss, it is important to consider the bigger picture. Inattentive snacking, frequency of snacking and nutritional quality of snacks chosen can all affect what snacking can mean to your waistline. More research is needed to lend further support to best practice recommendations regarding snacking behavior, but there are some strategies that have been shown to have beneficial impacts.

Our Advice:
If you are someone who likes to snack, make it an opportunity to include more nutritious foods in your diet. Focusing on including fruits and vegetables will ensure you are getting high quality snacks that can aid in maintaining a healthy weight and diet.
- Simplify healthy snacking by prepping or buying pre-sliced fruits & vegetables that are easy to grab on the go.
- Plan ahead when shopping for meals and snacks so healthy snacks are readily available, reducing the temptation for less healthy options.
- Pair fruits and vegetables with fats or protein, for example apple slices with a nut butter dip, for a filling and nutritious snack both adults and children will enjoy.
- Remember that every time you eat, it is an opportunity to fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables!
- Make healthy snacking fun by including kids in shopping and food preparation.
- Keep things fresh by trying out new, healthy snack recipes such as those found on the Fruits & Veggies—More Matters site.
Hand-washing is an easy way to prevent infection.

Understand when to wash your hands, how to properly use hand sanitizer and how to get your children into the habit.
Frequent hand-washing is one of the best ways to avoid getting sick and spreading illness. Hand-washing requires only soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer — a cleanser that doesn’t require water.

Find out when and how to wash your hands properly.

As you touch people, surfaces and objects throughout the day, you accumulate germs on your hands. In turn, you can infect yourself with these germs by touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Although it’s impossible to keep your hands germ-free, washing your hands frequently can help limit the transfer of bacteria, viruses and other microbes.

Always wash your hands before:

- Preparing food or eating
- Treating wounds, giving medicine, or caring for a sick or injured person
- Inserting or removing contact lenses

Always wash your hands after:

- Preparing food, especially raw meat or poultry
- Using the toilet or changing a diaper
- Touching an animal or animal toys, leashes or waste
- Blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing into your hands
- Treating wounds or caring for a sick or injured person
- Handling garbage, household or garden chemicals, or anything that could be contaminated — such as a cleaning cloth or soiled shoes
- Shaking hands with others
- In addition, wash your hands whenever they look dirty.

It’s generally best to wash your hands with soap and water. Follow these simple steps:

- Wet your hands with running water — either warm or cold.
- Apply liquid, bar or powder soap.
- Lather well.
- Rub your hands vigorously for at least 20 seconds. Remember to scrub all surfaces, including the backs of your hands, wrists, between your fingers and under your fingernails.
- Rinse well.
- Dry your hands with a clean or disposable towel or air dryer.
- If possible, use a towel or your elbow to turn off the faucet.

Antibacterial soaps, such as those containing triclosan, are no more effective at killing germs than is regular soap. Using antibacterial soap might even lead to the development of bacteria that are resistant to the product’s antimicrobial agents — making it harder to kill these germs in the future. In 2016 the Food and Drug Administration issued a rule under which over-the-counter consumer antiseptic wash products containing the majority of the antibacterial active ingredients — including triclosan and triclocarban — can no longer be marketed to consumers. These products include liquid, foam and gel hand soaps, bar soaps and body washes.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers, which don’t require water, are an acceptable alternative when soap and water aren’t available. If you use a hand sanitizer, make sure the product contains at least 60 percent alcohol. Then follow these simple steps:

- Apply enough of the product to the palm of your hand to wet your hands completely.
- Rub your hands together, covering all surfaces, until your hands are dry.

Antimicrobial wipes or towelettes are another effective option. Again, look for a product that contains a high percentage of alcohol. If your hands are visibly dirty, however, wash with soap and water.

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Help children stay healthy by encouraging them to wash their hands properly and frequently. Wash your hands with your child to show him or her how it’s done. To prevent rushing, suggest washing hands for as long as it takes to sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice. If your child can’t reach the sink on his or her own, keep a step stool handy.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are OK for children and adolescents, especially when soap and water aren’t available. However, be sure to supervise young children using alcohol-based hand sanitizers. Remind your child to make sure the sanitizer completely dries before he or she touches anything. Store the container safely away after use.

Hand hygiene is especially important for children in child care settings. Young children cared for in groups outside the home are at greater risk of respiratory and gastrointestinal diseases, which can easily spread to family members and other contacts.

Be sure your child care provider promotes frequent hand-washing or use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers. Ask whether the children are required to wash their hands several times a day — not just before meals. Note, too, whether diapering areas are cleaned after each use and whether eating and diapering areas are well-separated.

Hand-washing doesn’t take much time or effort, but it offers great rewards in terms of preventing illness. Adopting this simple habit can play a major role in protecting your health.