

Daily Habits That Get You Sick

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It is around that time of the year that the cold season is in full affect. The sniffles turn into full-blown congestion and the mild headache becomes a throbbing nightmare. While this seasonal bug often spreads like wildfire in schools and the workplace, it can easily be caught within the comfort of your own home. Sixty-five percent of colds and more than half of food-borne illnesses are contracted from homes. Daily tasks, including vacuuming, sleeping, opening windows, etc., are often why we get sick. *Arizona Foothills* spoke with Dr. Michael Robb, owner of FIX 24 in Scottsdale, to get a better understanding of what Valley residents can do to avoid seasonal colds and increase their overall health.

AFM: Are people more inclined to get sick in their own house?

DMR: In most cases, people are not inclined to get sick in their own house. Most people encounter sickness through transmission, where they come in contact with organisms in the public, in the workplace or even in a fitness center. People are 'adaptive' to their environment and since we spend a considerable amount of time in our homes practicing hygiene and housekeeping, generally we are less exposed to pathogens there. That is, if people take the proper precautions to ensure a clean environment at home. Home is an environment that people can control. Which is just the opposite when people are out in the public where they sometimes have no control over sanitary conditions lurking on every handrail, public restroom or public doorknob. Transmission through contact with the hands to the mouth is the most common reason that people get sick. Washing the hands after running errands, working in the public and performing fitness activities in a public center is the easiest thing to do in order to help minimize exposure to germs.

AFM: What are some short-term and long-term health effects that occur from doing daily activities around the home?

DMR: Common short-term negative health effects from activities of daily living such as not changing the toothbrush out, not changing the air-conditioner filter, not sanitizing the garbage disposal, not wiping down the doorknobs in the house, not sanitizing the shower, bathtub and toilet, can all be a breeding ground for bacteria and viruses. The short-term health effects can include acute respiratory problems, 24-hour sickness from viruses and bacterial organisms, acute nausea and vomiting, vertigo and dizziness, loss of appetite and the inability to perform necessary activities of family life. The long-term negative health effects can include chronic asthma, bronchitis, emphysema, parasitic infections, chronic allergies, lethargy, autoimmune disease and chronic skin disorders. The development and growth of mold spores within a home can be inconspicuous and a result of poor housekeeping. Mold can produce a host of symptoms that are challenging to diagnose.

AFM: What types of daily activities make one sick? What activity is the worst for your health?

DMR: Cooking and the preparation of food can be a major source of exposure to bacteria and viruses. Placing raw meat on a counter and neglecting to wipe the area down once the meat is being cooked is a common mistake that some families make in the kitchen. Spilling raw eggs on a countertop and neglecting to clean the area right away can establish an origin of sickness although invisible to the naked eye. Preparing and cutting raw food on a wood cutting board that has not been properly sanitized can also cross contaminate the food that is going to be consumed by food that was previously prepared. Wood cutting boards and wood cooking utensils are porous and can provide an ideal environment for pathogens to survive and multiply, thus, continuing to contaminate every time food is prepared.

AFM: What can individuals do to avoid getting sick?

DMR: Taking the necessary precautions and using common sense is the most important thing to do in order to avoid getting sick. Develop a plan that includes a scheduled cleaning of the kitchen, carpets, bathroom, doorknobs, dusting and air filter change-out. Place uncooked food items on plates, not the countertops. Prepare uncooked food on synthetic cutting boards and use metal cooking utensils. Cook food thoroughly. Wash your hands regularly. This should be done as soon as you arrive home and directly after food preparation. Place cracked eggs directly into the trash can. Monitor expiration dates on all food items in the home. Change out your toothbrush every other month.

AFM: Are there any special cleaning secrets one can do around the house to avoid the chances of getting sick?

DMR: Diluted bleach and water is a common and very effective way to ensure sanitary conditions around the home. Sodium chloride (salt) dissolved in warm water also makes a 'green' cleaning solution. Most bacteria cannot survive in a salt environment. Hydrogen peroxide is another effective cleaning agent that can help assure a clean environment for your family at home. Sprinkle baking soda onto the carpet prior to vacuuming and keep rubbing alcohol at an arms reach. It cleans just about anything in your home!