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# 10 Things You Think Are Healthy, but Aren't

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**1. Antibacterial Soap:** Washing your hands is your number one protection against the acquisition and spread of infectious disease. But you do not need to use antibacterial soap to get the job done. Studies have shown that people who use antibacterial soaps and cleansers develop a cough, runny nose, sore throat, fever, vomiting, diarrhea, and other symptoms just as often as people who use regular soaps. Part of the reason for this is because most of these symptoms are actually caused by *viruses*, which antibacterial soaps can't kill. But even for symptoms like vomiting and diarrhea, which may be caused by bacteria, using antibacterial soaps will offer you no advantage over plain soap and water. A 2007 systematic review published in the journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases* confirmed that antibacterial soap containing triclosan did not provide any additional benefit compared with a non-antibacterial soap. Antibacterial soap, will, however, expose you to triclosan, an antibacterial chemical that has been linked to concerns over antibiotic resistance and endocrine disruption. Some animal studies showed that triclosan caused fetal bone malformations in mice and rats, which may hint at hormonal effects. Triclosan has also been found to cause estrogenic activities in human breast cancer cells, which may stimulate the growth and development of cancer cells.

**2. Your Chair:** At the molecular level, your body was designed to be active and on the move all day long. When you stop moving for extended periods of time, such as by sitting, it's like telling your body it's time to shut down and prepare for death. Research published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, for instance, showed that women who sit for 10 or more hours a day may have a significantly greater risk of developing heart disease than those who sit for five hours or less. Research published in *Diabetologia* also found that those who sat for the longest periods of time were twice as likely to have diabetes or heart disease, compared to those who sat the least. Sitting for more than eight hours a day has also been associated with a 90 percent increased risk of type 2 diabetes. Excess sitting may increase your risk of colon, breast, and endometrial cancers, and the more hours you spend sitting in a day, the shorter your lifespan may be.

One study found, for instance, that reducing the average time you spend sitting down to less than three hours a day could increase your life expectancy by two years. If you work a desk job, a standing workstation will be instrumental for achieving this goal, and I also recommend getting 10,000 steps a day via daily walk, in addition to regular high-intensity exercises.

**3. Whitening or Antibacterial Toothpaste:** Whitening toothpastes may be grittier in order to scrub stains off your teeth, but the grit may actually wear away your enamel or make your teeth and gums more sensitive. Also be on the lookout for antibacterial toothpaste, like Colgate Total,

which contains triclosan.

**4. Cotton Swabs:** Your ears should have a healthy amount of earwax, as they're a self-cleaning part of your body. Excess earwax should move out of your ear canal automatically, as cells there actually migrate naturally. The removal of earwax is also helped along by movements of your jaw (talking, chewing, etc.), and once it reaches your outer ear it will simply fall out or be removed when you shower or bathe.

**5. Humidifier:** During the winter months, heaters and cold temperatures may lead to dry air with low humidity. This dry air can lead to dry skin, irritated sinuses and throat, and itchy eyes. Over time, exposure to low humidity can even dry out and inflame the mucous membrane lining your respiratory tract. When this natural barrier is no longer working properly, it increases your risk of colds, the flu, and other infections. Additionally, the moist, warm environment of a humidifier is a breeding ground for bacteria and fungi, which travel out of the unit via a "toxic mist" that you later breathe in.

**6. Loofah:** A loofah provides a perfect environment for bacteria, fungi, and mold to grow, especially when kept in the warm, humid confines of your bathroom or shower. As you run it over your skin, it's possible that small wounds (including tiny nicks from shaving) could be infected, leading to impetigo, folliculitis, or other skin issues.<sup>14</sup> If you love to loofah, choose one made of a natural fiber, which will naturally contain enzymes to inhibit microbial growth, and replace it monthly. After each use, wring it out and allow it to dry thoroughly – and store it in a cool, dry spot.

**7. Blender:** Blenders are handy for whipping up healthy morning smoothies... but if you're not washing yours properly, it could be a problem. The blender gasket (the rubber ring that holds the blade portion of the blender in place) has been found to be the third germiest item in the kitchen, and research showed it commonly harbored salmonella, E. coli, yeast, and mold.<sup>15</sup> The solution is simple – when you're done using your blender, be sure to disassemble it completely and wash each part, including the gasket, well.

**8. Nail Tools:** Pumice stones, cuticle clippers, and other nail tools harbor bacteria from your skin. If you neglect to wash them, they could potentially cause skin infections (this is especially true if you share your nail tools with friends or family members). Nail tools should be washed with soap and water after each use.

**9. Rubber Spatula:** Rubber spatulas were found to be even *germier* than blender gaskets, coming in at the second germiest item in the kitchen. The problem is that most people do not pull the spatula head off the handle when cleaning, which allows E. coli, yeast, and mold to grow. If your spatula comes apart, always remove the head and wash each piece separately.

**10. Stuffed Animals:** Stuffed animals are known to collect dust mites, which are a major cause of indoor dust allergies. If you're allergic, exposure can lead to sneezing, runny nose, itchy eyes, and other symptoms. If your child can't part with theirs, cut the number down to one or two kept on the bed, with the rest stored on a shelf. You can also put the stuffed animals in a plastic bag and leave it in the freezer overnight, as the cold will kill the dust mites.