

How to Stop Touching Your Face



Health experts say two things help stop the spread of germs. One of them is washing your hands. The other is to stop touching your face.

That second one is the biggest test for most of us. It is simple advice. But it is hard to do.

We rub our eyes. We scratch our noses. We put our fingers in our mouths. And we do it all without thinking.

It's not really our fault. Those face touches have become habits. But the coronavirus is still spreading. And it's still cold and flu season. Doctors say we need to stop touching our faces.

Germs Love Our Faces

A study five years ago showed how often most of us touch our faces. The total is about 48 times per hour. About 44% of the touches are to the eyes, nose, and mouth.

The eyes, nose, and mouth protect the inside parts of the body. But germs love those spaces. You can get germs from your phone or a doorknob. They get into your nose or mouth. Soon they are on their way to your throat and lungs.

William Sawyer is a family doctor in Ohio. He also started Henry the Hand. That is a group that tells people about keeping their hands clean.

We breathe in other people's germs. But Sawyer says people are more likely to get sick from germs they pick up on their hands and carry to their faces.

"They will give it to themselves, not the person down the hall," he said. Not touching their faces would be "greater than any vaccine."

How to Break the Habit

So how do we stop the touching habit? Elliot Berkman teaches psychology at the University of Oregon. He studies habits.

"Habit change is very, very difficult," he said. That's because we build habits over time. A habit of touching the face might have started with an itch. A scratch made it feel better. Then the scratch turned into a habit.

It's not enough to tell ourselves to stop a habit. Berkman says we need to do more. One tip: Wear something on the hand you use most. It can even be a piece of string. When you see it, it will remind you to stop touching your face.

What if you really need to scratch your face? Berkman says to put a tissue over your finger first. That will stop the germs from getting on your face.

Check Reading Comprehension

1. What are two ways experts say can help stop the spread of germs?
2. What are three ways that we touch our face?
3. What did a study from five years ago show about how often we touch our faces?
4. What is one way to break the habit of touching your face?

Discussion Questions

1. How can you stop touching your face?
2. What else are you doing to stay healthy?