

How to Actually Comply With the Don't-Touch-Your-Face Advice From Health Experts

Tips to squash this sneaky habit

If you've been heeding the advice of health officials lately, you've probably been washing your hands a lot, keeping your distance from others and crafting a homemade face cover to wear if you need to go out.

You've probably also become woefully aware of just how often you rub your eyes, itch your nose or bite your nails.

Health experts recommend that you avoid touching your face because it can potentially protect you from infection. While the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is believed to be spread mostly by inhaling droplets released when an infected individual coughs or sneezes, these droplets can also land on surfaces. If you touch an infected surface with your hand and then touch your eyes, nose or mouth — which are also entryways for viruses into your body — you could potentially become infected and get sick.

But not touching your face is easier said than done. Here's some advice on breaking the habit.

Step one: awareness

Hand-face contact happens often throughout the day — most of the time without us even realizing it. One Study of medical students found that participants touched their faces some 23 times an hour, and nearly half of those instances involved their eyes, nose or mouth.

“Most likely it's an unconscious or even nervous behavior, like twirling your hair,” says behavioral health clinical therapist Karen Tucker, LISW-S, ACSW.

So the first step to keeping your hands away from your face is simply becoming aware of when and how you do it. You might try to:

- **Observe others:** Noticing how and when others touch their face might cue you in to your own habits. Does your child rest their chin in the palm of their hand whenever they're bored? Are you doing the same?
- **Use a scented hand soap or lotion, or wear a little perform:** If your hands or wrists smell, you might be more likely to notice when you're about to touch your face and can reverse course.

Step two: trade in the habit

Once you become aware of your face-touching habits, changing them can take time and patience.

Here are some hands-off strategies to try.

- **Wear a face mask:** The CDC now recommends that Americans wear a homemade face cover if they go out in public. This can protect you in multiple ways, one being that it makes it harder for you to touch your mouth and nose.
- **Keep your hands busy:** When you're not up and about, find something to fiddle with at your desk to keep your hands occupied, like a stress ball, fidget spinner or rubber band.
- **Change your position:** If you're sitting at a desk or table, avoid putting your elbows on the table. Instead, place your hands underneath you, or fold them in your lap, so you have to do more work to bring them up to your face.
- **Be prepared with alternatives:** Keep tissues nearby that you can use if you have an itch or need to wipe your eyes, nose or mouth.
- **Keep washing your hands and social distancing:** Even with a concerted effort, you're probably never going to completely stop touching your face. But if you're keeping a safe distance from others and keeping your hands clean, that's not such a big deal. So hand-washing and social distancing remain your first lines of defense.

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