

OCTOBER: PREVENTING INFECTIONS

**“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”,
an old saying goes...**

Infectious diseases are of growing concern, as we watch a global increase in the spread of infections due to factors such as population shifts (rural to urban), crowded living, environmental changes, poor nutrition, limited access to healthcare and rapid world commerce and travel. Diseases no longer remain on the other side of the planet... They move quickly with travelers, foods and other products shipped or flown into our nation, and trucked to our home towns. And all the antibiotics in the world are of little use if the germs we face are already resistant to those drugs!

We read about contaminated foods being pulled from grocers' shelves, outbreaks of diarrhea in daycare centers, patients in hospitals who die because of an infection that should have been prevented, legislators writing laws that require healthcare organizations to report their rates of infection. What can we do to avoid infections? Are they all preventable?

“INFECTION CONTROL 101”

Our bodies are pretty amazing... Day after day, they work hard, digesting food, pumping blood and oxygen, sending signals from our brains via our nerves to all parts, eliminating waste materials. But there is a group of tiny invaders that can make our bodies very ill – GERMS!

Ask a kid – he or she may define germs as “bugs” or “cooties” or “gross stuff”. Actually, germs are tiny living creatures, so small and sneaky that they creep into our bodies without being noticed. Once they get into our bodies, we don't know until we have symptoms that say we've been attacked!

Germs are found all over the world, in all kinds of places. They may be bacteria or viruses or molds or parasites... these are all germs. They get their nutrients from their environments – in some cases, our bodies! But not all germs are bad... some bacteria live in our intestines and help us break down the food we eat so that our bodies can absorb nutrients. Some germs are used by scientists in laboratories to produce medicines and vaccines. They make grape juice become wine, and cause bread dough to rise, and help milk or cream to become cheese... not so bad after all, right?



But in the wrong places, germs can also cause illness, breaking down our skin and muscles and feeding on our bodies. They can produce poisons – toxins – that damage our organs.

PREVENTING INFECTION

Prevention is *much* easier than curing some infections:

- Wash your hands frequently (especially before you eat, drink, touch your eyes or nose) for at least 10 seconds with warm water and soap
- Take advantage of available immunizations to prevent vaccine-preventable diseases
- Use antibiotics wisely: We must all be aware of the increase in the number of germs that are resistant to available antibiotics: there are infections that we may not have medications to treat, and our only defense is avoiding them. Don't demand antibiotics when your healthcare professional has determined that they are not needed. When you are given antibiotics take the medicine exactly as the doctor tells you – do *not* skip doses, and complete the prescribed treatment, even if you are feeling better. Do *not* save any antibiotics for the next time you get sick (a different germ may cause your next illness, and it may require a different medication to treat it). Do *not* take antibiotics prescribed for someone else! – their antibiotic may not be the right one to treat your illness, and taking the wrong medicine may allow the germs to multiply while you delay getting the correct treatment
- Eat safely: remember the importance of selecting, washing, preparing and storing foods properly to avoid food related infections (“food poisoning”)
- Safe, responsible personal practices include avoiding high-risk sexual activities, sharing personal grooming items that may be soiled with blood or other potentially infectious body fluids; balance your exercise and rest
- A clean environment can make “a world of difference” in preventing infections: pay special attention to items that are used by multiple people (sinks, bathrooms, doorknobs, drawer handles, etc.)
- As we age, we need to take extra precautions, because our immune systems become weaker over time: the elderly are more susceptible to infections such as influenza, especially when living in residences where many people share close quarters (e.g., in nursing homes or board and care facilities)
- Kids – warm, messy, irresistibly cute...and covered with germs! Potty habits, shared toys and foods, the spread of germs before symptoms of illness become apparent – all contribute to kids getting – and sharing! – a variety of infections. Especially in a daycare setting, where lots of kids (and lots of germs) come together each day, adults must accept responsibility for controlling the spread of infections by practicing – and teaching the kids – good personal hygiene and environmental cleanliness. Kids are the greatest students – what they really need are good examples...

For more information , check these websites!
cdc.gov/ncidod
cdc.gov/drugresistance/healthcare

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