

# Germs Welcome Here!

If you look up “germaphobia” in Wikipedia, it is described as an obsessive-compulsive disorder and typified by these signs and symptoms:

- Excessive hand-washing
- An avoidance of locations that might contain a high presence of germs
- A fear of physical contact, especially with strangers
- Excessive effort dedicated to cleaning and sanitizing one’s environment
- A refusal to share personal items
- A fear of becoming ill

Does that sound familiar? Welcome to life amidst a viral pandemic! COVID-19 is a scary bug that has us ALL on high alert. But prevailing over our obsession, we must respect our body’s need for continual exposure to a diversity of good, healthy bugs.

We are each a massive collection of microbes! It is estimated that for every human cell in our bodies we have 10 microscopic bugs (bacteria, virus and fungi) living on us and in us — and without them we’re in trouble. (Picture Charlie Brown’s friend, Pig Pen, the cartoon character

who whirls around in a cloud of dust!)

We live quite peaceably with most species of our “microbiota.” In fact, many of the bacteria in the mouth, gut, vagina and on the skin profoundly helps us maintain overall health and strengthens our immune systems in countless ways. Furthermore, it’s well documented that exposure to the vast array of microbes that live outdoors helps boost our immunity.

If you’re interested in this subject check out the book “Let Them Eat Dirt: How Microbes Can Make Your Child Healthier” by microbiologists B. Brett Finlay and Marie-Claire Arrieta. You will discover why oversterilizing our skin, clothes, dishes and living environments has the potential for significant and long-term health complications such as digestive problems, asthma, allergies, disease susceptibility and more.

As for COVID-19, we WILL eventually slay this dragon, as we have so many other life-threatening bugs. And hopefully our germaphobia will fade away with it. I’m most curious about the lasting impact our germophobic mindset is having on young children, who don’t really

remember what it was like not to wear a mask and stay 6 feet away from our friends and neighbors.

At the end of the day, we are social beings — wired for human connection, for love and for belonging. These needs are most often demonstrated through gestures of touch: handshakes, hugs, kisses and handholding. We’re also wired for playing outside, in and amongst nature — and for petting our dogs, cats, bunnies and chickens. So leave your mask in the house and step out for a deep breath of fresh air ... and snag a good hug whenever it’s safe to do so.

Meanwhile, as we are teaching our children how to be fastidious about avoiding COVID-19 exposure, it might be an opportune time to explain our respect for the plethora of friendly bugs, the ones we can’t live without.



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