

Busting hygiene myths, part two

From health care providers to websites to advice passed down through generations, there are a lot of ways to get health care information, especially tips for minor ailments you can treat at home.

[Awad Alyami, MD](#), a pediatrician at OSF HealthCare, breaks down some common myths.

- Myth: When I shower, bathe or wash my hands, really hot water is best to kill germs.

Fact: Really hot showers can feel good, but they may burn your skin. Dr. Alyami recommends setting your home's water heater at 120 degrees or less. Then, when you use the shower or sink, warm, but not hot water is best.

Dr. Alyami adds that a cold shower after a sweaty summer activity is OK because it can reduce the chance of heat rash. But frequent cold showers can irritate your skin.

- Myth: Q-tips are meant for cleaning your ear.

Fact: "The ear is a self-cleaning oven. Most everything inside the ear will come out on its own," Dr. Alyami says. "When we put anything inside the ear, we are pushing everything from the outside to the inside, especially earwax. It makes it harder for the ear to clean itself."

Using Q-tips and similar devices can lead to injuries to the ear canal or eardrum, Dr. Alyami adds. Instead, during your shower or bath, gently clean and dry the outside of your ears. If your ears look or feel off (pain or itchiness, for example), see a provider.

"We can clean you safely in the office," Dr. Alyami says.

- Myth: For cuts and scrapes, apply antibiotic ointment like Neosporin until it heals.

Fact: You can apply the ointment once after cleaning the wound and then again after the wound is healed. But doing so often can lead to contact dermatitis, a bad skin reaction.

- Myth: The "five second rule" is OK for eating food that's fallen on the floor.

Fact: Dr. Alyami puts this one to rest once and for all: Don't do it. Always eat off a sanitary surface.

He even says that research has shown that bacteria from the floor can attach to food in as little as less than one second. Eating dirty food can lead to vomiting and stomach illnesses.