



Take Off Your Shoes



By Eleanor Rodgerson, MD

I READ THE OTHER DAY OF A NEW PARTY VOGUE — take off your shoes before entering the house and accept cute slippers the hostess presents.

It's a fun thing.

Actually, it's more than fun.

The concept is already practiced in many countries and it dates from generations when there were no paved streets, mostly mud, manure, and gunk underfoot.

Now the fad presents an opportunity to force a consciousness of what dirt may contain, of where germs may live and grow. Some sensitivity has been roused by the anthrax and smallpox scares, but more is needed.

Consider washing hands after shopping and petting the animals. Follow antiseptic hospital procedures carefully. Treat each patient as a possible carrier. Isolate "cold" sufferers. And acknowledge that you yourself might be the one spreading the bacteria and viruses.

Before my children were fed, in the '40s, I flamed the tops of the baby food cans over the gas burner to destroy previous handlers' germs lurking there.

Unnecessary? Was I killing organisms that might help develop immunity? Or was I ruling out infection?

When antibiotics eliminated and cured infections so miraculously, control and isolation faded. Prophylaxis was not vital anymore. The sad cases where infections occurred spread easily and rapidly. "Old wives" precautions were almost forgotten, not often practiced.

But bacteria and viruses survived and fought the anti-substances. They also manufactured new, hardier forms with potentials to win.

They were helped by the "Me" generation with its emphasis on self satisfaction. Its philosophy became popular. Historical concepts were outdated, infections trivialized. The spread of AIDS, killing more humans than the ancient plague epidemics, was one complication.

Recognition of the need for meticulous cleanliness and sensible precautions ought to lessen the transmission of dangerous organisms that lead to infections. Bacteria are not going to lie around, inactive.

"Take off your shoes."

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