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"For anyone who lives in the oak-and-maple area of New England, there is a perennial temptation to plunge into a purple sea of adjectives about fall."

— Hal Borland —

DOCTOR'S CORNER
by Dr. Richard Johnson Dunbarton



SHOES – A CONTROVERSIAL HEALTH ISSUE?

This month I will raise a potentially controversial issue. No, not truth to power or politically divisive, simply controversial. By looking at both sides of the issue, hopefully we will be better able to decide and better able to understand why people do what they do. The controversial issue is this: do you wear the same shoes inside your home that you have been wearing in the outside world? I grew up in a farming community and learned at an early age that you do NOT walk into the house with the shoes or boots that you wore in the barn or chicken house or simply the wonderful word that was our playground. Secondly, I have had the good fortune to travel to many different cultures and lived for two years in Turkey. The cultural practice of removing shoes before going into your home is very common in eastern countries. The practice also exists in some western countries, as well as in the US: Alaska, Hawaii, the northwest and the northeast. Finally, many religions have the practice of removing footwear when one enters the sacred space of worship.

A CBS poll ⁽¹⁾ found that 2/3 Americans take their shoes off when they enter their home, while 1/3 keep their shoes on. Younger Americans (18-29) will be more likely (44%) to ask guests to remove their shoes, whereas only 13% aged 45-64 will ask their guests to remove shoes. Some people would say that asking a guest to remove their shoes means you care more about your house than their comfort.

A 2023 study found, among other things, that Cr, Cu, Mn, Pb, and Zn were higher in indoor dust than in adjoining garden soils. ⁽²⁾

Shoes can pick up allergens, lawn chemicals, and asphalt toxins.

Clostridium difficile has been found on 26% of shoes. This organism can cause inflammation of the intestine, diarrhea, and stomach pain. These infections can result in as many as 29,000 deaths in America per year.

E. Coli is another frequent rider on the soles of shoes. This bacterium is common and comes from feces (poop).

Some would say that we don't want to have a "sterile" home. We need to be exposed to all kinds of potentially harmful things, so we can develop our immune system. Well, let's go outside, enjoy those toxins and develop our immune system. You do not need to bring them into your home, especially if you live with an immunocompromised person or have small children crawling on the floors.

Following the principle that prevention is usually better than treatment my recommendation would be to keep outside shoes outside (whoever does the sweeping and vacuuming will thank you!). Encourage your guests to respect your house and show them respect by alerting them ahead of time so they can bring their own 'house shoe' or you can provide slippers for them. If you need to wear footwear for stability or comfort, purchase a pair of slippers or stable sneakers dedicated to wear only in your house.

1. www.cbsnews.com/news/most-americans-are-shoes-off-at-home/

2. www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0013935122025002?via%3Dihub

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