

# Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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## “Three Common Habits That Can Be Harmful”

Many of us have overlooked health habits that can be harmful and should be avoided. Certain bad habits can lead to poorer lifestyle behaviors over the long term. Current events involving the coronavirus pandemic have taught us to be more vigilant in adhering to good hygiene practices when it comes to our interactions with others. But it is also important to be cognizant of smaller, more personal bad habits that we may fall prey to in our everyday lives. Here are three overlooked, but potentially harmful, health habits to avoid. **Sharing Toothbrushes.** Reportedly, sharing a toothbrush is a remarkably common occurrence, at least according to a survey conducted by the Oral Health Foundation and Philips out of the United Kingdom. They found that about a quarter of those polled (26%) reported their willingness to share their toothbrush with another person, with significantly more men (32%) amenable to the gesture than women (20%). The mouth is home to more than 700 types of bacteria, with any person harboring 200 or more types, as well as fungi and viruses. To boot, wet toothbrushes are ideal surfaces for mold growth. Even scarier, HIV and hepatitis B virus have also been known to hop onto the head of a toothbrush, making for potentially deadly cargo. **Bonding with the Dog—and Not Washing your Hands Afterward.** According to the American Pet Products Association, most US households (67%) own a pet, with over 60 million US households boasting dog ownership. And research has shown that dogs improve the health of their owners in various ways, including the promotion of exercise, increased longevity, and improved heart health and mental well-being. But dogs can also expose us to dangerous pathogens—such as methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) and *Campylobacter jejuni*—thus increasing the risk of potentially deadly infections and diseases, including septicemia and rabies. Washing your hands after petting your dog or handling their toys or food (as pathogens may also be transmitted via dog saliva and waste) is the best way to reduce, if not eliminate, the risk of zoonotic disease from your pet. **Sharing and 'Borrowing' Meds.** This occurs when one person simply gives medication—whether prescribed or over the counter—to another without the input of a physician. And, according to the results of a systematic review, the practice is particularly widespread among prescription medication users. Without proper medical guidance, this could result in addiction, gradual resistance to efficacy, as well as serious health complications or death from allergic reaction, adverse drug side effects, adverse drug-drug interactions, or inaccurate treatment (i.e., taking the wrong meds to treat a specific illness).

In the America that I love, avoiding these commonly overlooked harmful health habits can give real benefits.

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