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Shoes Off! Keep Germs Outside

It may take some getting used to, and some friends may think it odd, but banning shoes in the house is a good idea. Research has shown that when we're out and about, our shoes come into direct contact with a variety of microbes, including viruses and bacteria. If we walk around our homes in these same shoes without disinfecting them first, we can track in some of those germs and spread them through living spaces.

Pollen and mold can also come into the house on shoes. Upping the gross factor, think about picking up fecal matter left by pets on lawns, driveways and sidewalks, as well as the human kind from public restroom floors.

Keeping the indoor sanctuary as clean as possible should be job number one, especially if one or more people in the house are allergy sufferers, immunocompromised individuals or small children that play on the floor and regularly stick things into their mouths.

Organisms survive longer in carpets, which are harder to clean and disinfect than hard floors, but the easiest solution is to leave shoes by the front door. Setting up a seat and shoe storage area at the entrance makes the transition much easier.

Designate one or two pairs as

indoor shoes—they could be slippers or comfy loafers that never go outdoors. Socks or good-old-fashioned bare feet are also options. Some people swear by antimicrobial doormats, wiping their feet two or more times on the treated mat before crossing the threshold.

Periodically cleaning shoes is a good idea, too. The first step is to check the shoe manufacturer's instructions. Some shoes, like canvas sneakers, can be placed in the washing machine and air dried. Most rubber or leather soles can be scrubbed with soapy water using an old toothbrush or a washcloth. Avoid detergents or cleaners with bleach unless the shoes are white. Thoroughly rinse off the soap, to avoid making the shoes slippery.

Asking guests to remove their shoes before entering the abode may feel awkward. Be kind and gentle when making the request, explaining that it will help preserve the family's health. And if they seem uncomfortable, be flexible. When hosting a gathering, it may be wise to give invitees advance warning of the no-shoe preference so that they can bring slippers or socks. A proactive host might even have fresh socks or house shoes available for guests.