

how bad is it...

Straight answers to scratch-your-head questions.



...to not rinse a dog's paws after a walk in the snow?

Your pup's paws don't need to be washed after a snowy stroll unless they've come into contact with road salt or other deicers, says veterinarian Brian Collins, D.V.M., of the Cornell University Hospital for Animals in Ithaca, NY. The chemicals in those products can irritate paws—and, worse, cause an illness if your dog licks his feet and ingests the stuff—so once you get home, dip Fido's tootsies in a bowl of warm water, and towel them off. (Bonus: This also prevents salt damage to your floors and furniture.) If you didn't encounter salt, it's fine to just dry off your dog's feet. What about suiting up your furry friend in rubber boots? Says Dr. Collins, "Your dog might not like wearing them, but they can really help on salty sidewalks."

not so bad!

...to use new dishes without washing them first?

Don't even think about eating off those plates without giving them a proper cleaning. Even though the dishes haven't yet been used, chemicals found in plastic and foam packaging may have contaminated them, says Josie Znidarsic, D.O., a preventive medicine doctor at the Cleveland Clinic Wellness Institute in Lyndhurst, OH. If you've bought unwrapped dishes or cups from a store, keep in mind that they've probably been handled by many other people, not to mention the dust (or even insects or rodents) that might have touched them as they sat on the shelf. The fix: Run new dishes through the dishwasher to remove bacteria or chemicals.

super bad!



...to let your kid wear hand-me-down shoes?

Go ahead, let your little one walk a mile in someone else's shoes. Just make sure the hand-me-downs are the right size and still in good shape, advises Louis J. DeCaro, D.P.M., president of the American College of Foot and Ankle Pediatrics. The side walls of the shoes shouldn't cave in or turn out. Also, check the soles to determine that the treads are still intact and one side isn't more worn than the other. If the shoes smell, that could be a sign of fungi from the previous owner's wear. Play it safe by misting them with athlete's foot spray before your child slips them on, says Dr. DeCaro.

not bad at all!

help wanted



...to use the leftover water in your teakettle?

Enjoy that cuppa! There's no danger in reboiling water left in a kettle and drinking it, says Cathy Kapica, Ph.D., a food scientist and CEO of the Awegrin Institute, a public health think tank. Boiling water tends to destroy most germs and bacteria. However, contaminants from the kettle could leech into the water if it's left in there too long. And calcium naturally found in hard water could settle on the bottom of the vessel, adding tiny white flakes to the water. Her recommendation: Change the water every week or so, and use a glass or stainless steel kettle. You can also give your kettle this refresh every once in a while to remove mineral buildup: Fill the kettle with water, and add 2 tablespoons each of baking soda and lemon juice. Boil for 30 minutes, then rinse well.

not bad at all!

...to weigh yourself every morning?

Step away from the scale. Tallying pounds daily isn't an accurate way to measure weight loss progress, says registered dietitian Alissa Rumsey, R.D., a spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Your weight can fluctuate as much as several pounds every day based on factors like your fluid levels, salt intake, and menstrual cycle. "There's really no point in tracking the numbers daily, and it can be very discouraging to people," says Rumsey, who recommends weighing in no more than once a week. The best time? First thing in the morning, after you've used the bathroom.

pretty bad!



...to continue buying incandescent bulbs?

It's not a bright idea for the environment or your wallet. True, the newest incandescents use less energy than older versions did, but they are still far less efficient than LEDs (light-emitting diodes) and CFLs (compact fluorescent lamps), says Noah Horowitz, a senior scientist at the Natural Resources Defense Council. While LEDs and CFLs cost more up front, their life spans are significantly longer, so they save you money down the road. "An LED bulb will last up to 25 years and a CFL up to 10 years, but an incandescent, only about a year," he says. If you're debating between CFLs and LEDs, Horowitz suggests the latter. "The LEDs on the market today truly mimic the natural glow you're used to with an incandescent," he says. "I promise you won't miss your old bulbs."

really bad!

...to snack on an item at the grocery store while you're still shopping?

Don't just dig in. Stores have differing policies on snacking, says Heather Garlich of the Food Marketing Institute, a trade group whose members include ACME, Kroger, and Safeway. If you want to quell your hunger pangs, "ask a store associate first," says Garlich. "The majority of retailers are willing to accommodate." Keep track of what you ate—particularly if you are sampling pay-per-pound food—and save wrappers so you can settle up when you check out or you risk ending up on the hook for shoplifting. An easier solution when hunger strikes is to steer your cart toward the free samples.

kinda bad!

