Ask POZ – March 2020

I recently got a flu shot. Can I still get influenza?; Is it better to clean your hands with soap or hand sanitizer?; Do puzzles help improve memory and brainpower?

February 24, 2020 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

I recently got a flu shot. Can I still get influenza?

The flu shot significantly reduces your chances of getting influenza, but you can still catch it. Some years, the flu vaccine's coverage is better than in other years.

However, despite the fact that the vaccine isn't 100% effective, it's still a good idea to get a flu shot. It's safe for people with HIV to get the shot, but not the nasal spray flu vaccine. Studies show that people who are vaccinated but still get sick tend to experience less severe symptoms and require fewer doctor visits and hospitalizations.

In addition to getting a flu shot, you can minimize your odds of getting the flu by washing your hands frequently (see below), avoiding close contact with sick people and keeping unwashed hands away from your face. If you do get the flu, you can get relief by treating the symptoms.

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Is it better to clean your hands with soap or hand sanitizer?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, washing your hands with soap and water removes more microbes than hand sanitizers do. However, this assumes proper technique—whether you use soap and water or hand sanitizer, there is a right way.

Good technique includes lots of vigorous rubbing and scrubbing. Clean every part of your hands, including the backs, between the fingers and under the nails. Do this for at least 20 seconds.

No soap or water available? Use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Again, apply friction, and be sure to clean every part of your hands.

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Do puzzles help improve memory and brainpower?

Maybe, but there isn't enough evidence to know for sure. The data aren't convincing, and research swings from yes to no to maybe. We do know that brain games won't hurt you, so if you enjoy playing them, continue to do so.

If you want to protect your brain, there is strong evidence supporting the following actions:

- Be physically active.
- Eat healthy foods.

- Sleep seven to nine hours most nights.
- Maintain your health, including normal weight, blood pressure and blood sugar levels.
- Stay connected with family, friends and community.
- Reduce stress; try meditation.
- Avoid alcohol, tobacco products and recreational drugs.

In 2020, Brain Awareness Week is March 16 to 20. BrainAwareness.org offers more information.

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