

# Psychologists to public: Here's how to stop touching your faces

April 3 2020, by Amy McCaig



## REDUCE FACE TOUCHING

Tips from behavioral scientists to reduce the spread of COVID-19

**Increase Awareness**

- Ask a partner to tell you when you touch your face
- Wear perfume or bracelets to remind you not to touch your face
- Carry a pen and paper to record how often you touch your face each day

**Help Others**

- Think of the people you are trying to protect by not touching your face
- Gently remind others when you notice them touching their face

**Do Other Things with Your Hands**

- Put your hands in your pockets
- Hold a ball or deck of cards in your hands
- Make fists with hands for 1 minute if you bring your hands near your face

**Change Postures**

- Keep your elbows off the table
- Sit in chairs without armrests, or in the middle of the couch
- Sit on your hands if it's hard to not touch your face

**Practice Relaxation Techniques**

- Focus on taking long, slow, deep breaths and on relaxing muscles that feel tense
- Sit in a quiet place and focus on the present moment rather than the past or future
- Spend time in nature at a safe distance from others, even sitting under a tree

**stop touching your face**

More information is available here: <https://wp.me/p8IxYp-1tg>

PSYCHONOMIC SOCIETY

Credit: Rice University

The average person touches their face 23 times an hour. It's an activity

so common most people don't realize when or how much they're doing it.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, [health organizations](#) are [urging people to stop touching their faces](#) to stop the spread of the virus and flatten the curve. Jim Pomerantz, a professor of psychological sciences at Rice University and chair of the Psychonomic Society Governing Board, and his fellow members of the society have teamed up to develop a list of five science-backed recommendations for kicking or minimizing this routine habit.

"Most people who are going to die from COVID-19 [have not yet been diagnosed as infected as of today](#), so preventing new infections should be our primary focus," Pomerantz said.

"The thing that's become totally clear, if it wasn't clear already, is that viruses are spread through [human behavior](#)," he continued. "Typically we'll do something like shaking someone's [hand](#) and then failing to wash our hands properly, followed by touching our [faces](#) and then we're off to the races with an infection and symptoms that will show up in 2-14 days. It's much better to prevent an infection than to try to deal with it after the fact, and that's the purpose of our work here."

Absent a vaccine, which won't be ready for some time, Pomerantz said avoiding touching your face is more effective than any other medical interventions for stopping the spread of the virus.

"Rather than taking advice from a neighbor or your grandmother who tells you to take supplements or eat [chicken soup](#) when you've got the flu, we were looking for science-based steps that we all can take that are simple, proven to be effective and we can start doing today to reduce the frequency of this behavior," he said.

Pomerantz and his fellow researchers developed a chart of

recommendations, which is available [online](#). The recommendations are as follows:

- Increase awareness. Ask a partner to tell you when you touch your face, wear perfume or bracelets to remind you not to touch your face, and/or carry a pen and paper to record how many times you touch your face each day.
- Help others. Think of the people you are trying to protect by not touching your face, and gently remind others when you notice them touching their face.
- Do other things with your hands. Put your hands in your pockets, hold a ball or a deck of cards in your hands, or make fists with your hands for one minute if you bring them near your face.
- Change postures. Keep your elbows off the table, sit in chairs without armrests or in the middle of the couch, and sit on your hands if you find it is hard to avoid touching your face.
- Practice relaxation techniques. Focus on taking long, slow, deep breaths and on relaxing muscles that feel tense, sit in a quiet place and focus on the [present moment](#) rather than the past or future, or spend time in nature at a safe distance from others.

"Many of us have taken a course in introductory psychology where we learned about conditioning and the laws of behavior, and how we can establish and change behavior," Pomerantz said. "We know that this works. And if people put these ideas into practice immediately we're going to see, we hope, some flattening of the curve much more quickly than otherwise."

Provided by Rice University

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