

# help wanted

Straight answers to  
scratch-your-head questions.

## *how bad is it...*

...to **vacuum**,  
rather than  
sweep, the  
kitchen floor?

Don't worry about bits of food gunking up your machine. Vacuuming is still better than sweeping. "Sweeping in the kitchen stirs up dust, which will just settle back on your counters or the floor," says Debra Johnson, training manager for Merry Maids. "Vacuuming eats up the dirt." Just make sure the vacuum is on the hard-floor setting so you don't scratch your hardwood or tile, and shake out crumbs from the bag or canister after each use to prevent mold and smells.

**not bad at all!** 😊



help wanted *how bad is it...*



### ...to not wear green on St. Patrick's Day?

Even if you can't trace your roots back to the Emerald Isle, it's still a nice gesture to sport some green on March 17. It is not only a show of goodwill but could also prevent a pinch. Quick history lesson: The practice started in the United States about 300 years ago, when revelers wore shamrocks to celebrate Ireland's patron saint. Legend has it that donning the shade renders one invisible to leprechauns, who pinch anyone they see. Skipping out "makes you look like a bit of a poor sport," says Joy Weaver, author of *How to Be Socially Savvy in All Situations*. While head-to-toe emerald isn't necessary, she advises attempting to take part, whether it's with a sweater, socks, or a coat of nail polish.

**kinda bad!** 😊

### ...to save seats at the movies?

Reserving spots for late-arriving friends is like chatting through previews—a no-no. "Be reasonable," says Lisa Mirza Grotts, founder and CEO of the AML Group, an etiquette consulting agency. It's fine if you're holding a spot for a friend who's in the bathroom or for someone who hasn't arrived well before the movie starts. But if the lights have dimmed, your friend is MIA, and strangers are looking for seats, give it up. Also, no saving a row of seats for a group! Keep it to one or two. "It comes down to common courtesy and making the theater experience pleasant for everyone," says Grotts. After all, who wants to be the jerk people are talking about when the lights come on?

**not bad at all!** 😊  
(if your friend is in the bathroom)

**pretty bad!** 😞  
(if she's MIA and the movie is about to start)



### ...to google medical information?

Google away—just don't get carried away. Be aware of how much time you spend looking up ailments and your sources' quality, says Samuel Altstein, D.O., medical director at Mount Sinai's Beth Israel Medical Group. "Stick with sites known for reputable data," he says, like that of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Medscape. And don't assume the worst: Not every headache is a brain tumor. That said, if the symptoms you're googling persist, call your doctor.

**not so bad!** 😊



...to keep the **same earrings** in for weeks at a time?

No matter how much you love those studs, give them some nights off. Repeatedly sleeping with earrings in can stretch out the piercings, making lobes droopy. "Worst case, they can become so elongated, you won't be able to wear earrings unless you get surgery," says Carolyn Jacob, M.D., a member of the American Academy of Dermatology. If the earrings contain nickel—and even those made of 24-karat gold can—prolonged wear also puts you at risk for contact dermatitis, an itch-inducing skin condition. So take off your earrings before bed. "It will save your ears wear and tear," says Dr. Jacob.



**super bad!** 😞



...to give your dog a **leftover bone**?

You may want to share the remains of that steak with your pup, but giving a dog a bone from a human meal—especially if it was cooked—is a bad idea. "Cooked bones can splinter into shards that could damage your dog's intestines," says Lisa Peterson, spokesperson for the American Kennel Club. "Chicken and fish bones are most dangerous because they're so small." To satisfy Fido's instinct to gnaw, Peterson suggests sterilized marrow bones, which are rock hard, or Nylabones, which are made of nylon.

**really bad!** 😞

...to put a **lemon slice** in a drink without washing it?

It can be a little gross—but cutting a lemon and dropping it into your seltzer probably won't hurt you. True, when you slice through an unwashed lemon rind, the bacteria on the outside can be transferred inside. But those germs likely won't live long, thanks to the lemon's acidity. Also, that type of bacteria isn't pathogenic, meaning it won't make you sick. "Based on the data we've seen, catching an illness from a lemon rind is very low risk," says Ben Chapman, Ph.D., a food safety extension specialist at North Carolina State University. Still, if the thought of consuming bacteria skeeves you out, give the lemon a quick rinse under running water before slicing it.

**kinda bad!** 😞



...to not tell the cashier that she gave you the **wrong change**?

Your free money could cost the cashier. Most businesses require clerks to tally the day's transactions and reconcile that amount with what's left in the register. If they're short any amount over \$1, the difference often comes out of their pay, says Lita Epstein, author of *Bookkeeping for Dummies*. Too many shortfalls and the cashier could get canned. Before you walk away, consider that the person behind the counter may pay for the mistake with her job.

**really bad!** 😞

