

Personal hygiene practices with special reference to Towel hygiene practices: An exploratory study

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■ **ABSTRACT** : Health is the normal and healthy state of body. Health refers to a healthy state of mind and body physically fit to have no disorder, illness or disease. Good personal hygiene is important for both health and social reasons. Personal hygiene is how we care for our body. In bathing, towels play a very important role. Towels are incredibly useful home textiles, whether they used for guest, bath, hand, or beach, all towels share one thing in common: they need to absorb moisture and dry quickly. As they used, they get dirty easily and then smells stinky. The longer towels stay damp, the longer the yeasts, bacteria, molds and viruses remain alive and stay active. Dirty towels can carry a huge variety of microbes, and they've even been linked to spreading infectious disease. The present study was conducted to get the data of towel hygiene. For this purpose hundred respondents were selected. Structured interview schedule was used for data collection. Results revealed that majority of respondents were following unhealthy practices

■ **KEY WORDS**: Towel hygiene, Towel washing practices, Drying practices, Recommended hygiene practices

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Health is the normal and healthy state of body. It is a great source of piece of happiness. Health refers to a healthy state of mind and body physically fit to have no disorder, illness or disease. In simple terms, health refers to a person's physical, emotional and psychological well beings. Good personal hygiene is important for both health and social reasons. It entails keeping our hands, head and body clean so as to stop the spread of germs and illness. Our personal hygiene benefits our own health and impacts the lives of those around us, too.

Personal hygiene is how we care for our body. This practice includes bathing, washing hands, brushing teeth, and more. There's nothing like a good bath or shower. You lather up, rinse off and step out feeling clean, refreshed and energized. Then you grab a towel and all of that healthy hygiene may go right out the window. And in bathing, towels play a very important role. Towels are incredibly useful home textiles, whether they used for guest, bath, hand, or beach, all towels share one thing in common: they need to absorb moisture and dry quickly. As they used, they get dirty easily and then smells stinky.

The longer towels stay damp, the longer the yeasts, bacteria, molds and viruses remain alive and stay active.

Dirty towels can carry a huge variety of microbes, and they've even been linked to spreading infectious disease. "You can't keep your towels 100 per cent germ-free", experts say. Towels are such great bacteria traps because every time we use a towel, we transfer our natural skin bacteria, and any other germs we are carrying, onto their surface. And towels offer the perfect environment for bacteria and other micro-organisms to grow because they're often damp, warm and absorbent. "They can cause an outbreak of toenail fungus, athlete's foot, jock itch and warts, or cause these skin conditions to spread. And dirty towels can certainly cause a flare-up of eczema or atopic dermatitis"- explains dermatologist.

Every day, we come into contact with millions of outside germs and viruses. They can linger on our body, and in some cases, they may make us sick. Personal hygiene practices can help us and the people around us prevent illnesses. They can also help us feel good about our appearance. Many people don't wash their hands thoroughly, so when they dry their hands on a towel, they're rubbing bacteria into a place it's likely to grow. Because our hands can transfer microbes to our towels from whatever they touch, the bathroom is an especially threatening place for a towel to spend most of its time. There, our hands touch fecal organisms like coliform bacteria-organisms that can indicate the presence of disease-causing bacteria in water *Escherichia coli* or even *Salmonella*, according to Charles Gerba, a microbiologist at the University of Arizona.

One of the observation made by researcher that the user doesn't wash their towels often. In a study conducted by the University of Arizona, it was found that 90 per cent of bathroom towels were contaminated with coli form bacteria (bacteria present in feces) and about 14 per cent carried *E. coli*. Towels are prolific for breeding this sort of bacteria because they contain the moisture, warmth, and organic material that allow these bacteria to thrive, especially when they are hung in a steamy, dark bathroom with the door closed. This is why the average towel was found to be harboring 164,000 bacteria per square inch and to put that in perspective that is 465 times more than your toilet seat. The chief culprit in this regard is our hand towel because it is used frequently by several people and has the least chance to

dry before being used again. If people don't wash their hands correctly before drying, then they are essentially depositing bacteria on their hand towel, where it will only multiply and faster. Every day, we come into contact with millions of outside germs and viruses. They can linger on our body, and in some cases, they may make us sick. Personal hygiene practices can help us and the people around us to prevent illnesses. In this context this study has been done with the objective to study the towel hygiene practices followed by young women.

■ RESEARCH METHODS

For this study, 100 house wives and students were selected purposively keeping in mind the easy accessibility of the investigator. A structured interview schedule was prepared with the help of literature. To get the correct and viable information, every person was interviewed personally. Interview schedule consist of two parts. The first part includes Questions related to background information and second part consists of information from the respondents related to towels. Data were coded and analyzed.

■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The result of the present study as well as relevant discussions has been presented under sub heads General information of respondents, Towel hygiene practices followed and recommendation for improved practices.

General information of respondents :

Table 1 revealed that seventy per cent the fact that about 43.33 per cent respondents were graduate and only 26.66 per cent respondents were post-graduate while 30 per cent respondents were XII passed. Sixty per cent respondents belong to nuclear family and 75 per cent were

Sr. No.	Particulars	Categories	Percentage
1.	Age	22-27	30
		28-35	70
2.	Education	XII Pass	30
		Graduate	44
		Post-graduate	26
3.	Family type	Joint	40
		Nuclear	60
4.	Occupation	House wife	75
		Student	25

housewives.

Towel hygiene practices followed and recommendation for improved practices :

This part includes specific information from the respondents related to towels hygiene like- do you use and wash towels, do you wash them separately, how often you wash them, do you use any antiseptic during washing.

Table 2 gives clear picture about the specific information regarding the hygiene practice of towels. The interview schedule reveals that 90 per cent of the respondents use proper towel and 10 per cent use old cotton cloth which is available at home. 70 per cent respondents use cotton towel while remaining 30 per cent respondent's synthetic towels. When reasons for using cotton towel was asked it was reported that cotton is more absorbent fabric as compared to synthetic. When we asked about the choice of colour, 15 per cent respondents use only white coloured towel, 25 per cent use light colour towels, 40 per cent use medium dark colour and 20 per cent respondents use solid dark colour towels. While doing informal discussion respondents using white towel reported that they like to use clean and neat towel as soon as the towel gets dirty they can easily visualize and keep the towel for washing. When we asked about the type of the towel used, 45 per cent use piled towels and 55 per cent use other type of weave (can be a thin towel). Good absorbency was the reason for using pile towel as reported by respondents.

When asked about type of water used majority of the respondents were using cold water, only twenty per cent respondents used hot water. It was suggested by researcher that hot water is better able to dissolve oils from bath products or your skin which cause them to become stiff. Check the care tag and wash them in the hottest water safe for the fabric to really get them clean and kill germs.

When asked about the practices followed while using new towel it was reported that 40 per cent of them washed a new towel before use and 60 per cent don't. Only 20 per cent respondents checked the care labels and 80 per cents do not check. Ignorance may be the reason for not checking the care label. When it comes to washing 70 per cent admit that they wash them with other clothes. when asked why they wash towel with other cloths majority of respondents reported that to save

water and use of soap they wash the towel along with other household clothes.

When frequency of washing was asked 40 per cents said that they wash towels once a week, 20 per cents replied that they washed twice a week and 30 per cents respondents were there who wash their towels once a month. Only 10 per cent respondents wash their towels after each use. It was suggested by researcher to keep their towel cleanest. Wash them more often, it seems obvious to say that washing your bath towels regularly, but according to a recent survey, almost half of us aren't washing our towels frequently enough. Towels begin to smell and contract germs quickly and should be laundered after every third use.

Only 10 per cent were using antiseptic during washing. Reasons were asked for using antiseptic it was reported that it kills bacteria and germs. It was also suggested by researcher to use vinegar as vinegar removes almost any kind of build-up. Try using about 1 cup of white vinegar with a little bit of detergent to remove the chemical debris and hard water stuck in the fibres of your towels. This will help your towels feel softer against your skin and will bring back some of the absorbency. 20 per cent were using soap, 30 per cent detergent, 10 per cent liquid detergent, 20 per cent soap powder and 30 per cent were using detergent powder. It was also reported by the respondents that they use more soap and soap powder for washing heavily soiled towel. It was by researcher don't use excess detergent, using more than the recommended amount of detergent in washing doesn't increase the cleanliness of the towels. In fact, because towels are absorbent, extra soap suds will soak into them and, if not rinsed well, the leftover soap or detergent can actually feed bacteria and mold. The residue detergent can also leave towels stiff, rough and scratchy.

In response to drying and finishing practices followed it was found that 80 per cent respondents dry towel completely. Only twenty per cent respondents iron the towel. Sixty per cent respondents felt foul smell while using and 70 per cent found it in rainy season, 25 per cent found it in summers and 5 per cent in winters. Only 20 per cent were taking measures to avoid foul smell like washing, proper drying followed by ironing. It was suggested by researcher that don't leave towel in the machine or bathroom, wet items should be removed from the bathroom or washing machine promptly. Don't give

Table 2 : Towel hygiene practices followed by of respondents			(n=100)
Sr. No.	Aspects	Categories	%
1.	Use towel or cloth	Towel	90
		Old cotton cloth	10
2.	Type of towel material used	Use cotton towel	70
		Use synthetic towel	30
3.	Colour of towel	Only white	15
		Light colour	25
		Medium dark colour	40
		Solid dark colour	20
4.	Type of towel used	Plied weaved	45
		Other type of weave	55
5.	Wash new towel before use	Yes	40
		No	60
6.	Check care labels	Yes	20
		No	80
7.	Washing towel	wash towels separately	30
		With other cloth	70
8.	Frequency of washing towel	after each use	10
		Once a week	40
		Twice a week	20
		Once in a month	30
9.	Type of water used for washing	Cold	80
		Hot	20
10.	Who washes towel	Yourself	40
		Family member/ Maid	30
		Washer man	30
11.	Washing method used*	Hand washing	10
		Beating	20
		Boiling in soda	20
		Machine washing	50
12.	Washing auxiliaries used*	Soap	20
		Detergent	30
		Liquid soap	10
		Soap powder	20
		Detergent powder	30
13.	Drying of towel *	In shade	60
		In sunlight	40
14.	Finishing of towel	Yes	20
		No	80
15.	After each use dry towel completely	Yes	80
		No	20
16.	Use any kind of anti-septic during washing	Yes	10
		No	90
17.	Felt foul smell while using	Yes	60
		No	40
18.	Frequency of observing foul smell *	Summer	25
		Winters	5
		Rainy season	70
19.	Measures taken to avoid foul smell	Washing and drying	80
		Washing , Drying and Ironing	20
20.	Dry towel after each bath	Yes	60
		No	40
21.	Place of drying	Bathroom hanger	40
		Open in sun	60
22.	Use the same towels	Yes	80
		No	20
23.	No. of towel	One	20
		More then one	80

*Multiple response

mildew and mold an opportunity to set in! Throw wet towels into the dryer or hang them up properly with lots of room to air and make sure they don't have any bunching.

It was also found that 40 per cent of respondents hangs wet towel on hooks in bathroom due to laziness or ignorance. It was suggested by researcher that give towel space to breathe, If you're short on towel hanging space, you may be guilty of using one hook for more than one towel. This is a bathroom no-no. Without proper ventilation space, the moisture in towels breed bacteria and mold.

In response to question using same towel every day it was found that majority of respondents were using one towel while 20 per cent had two or more towel. It was suggested to respondents that it's important to have a few towels in rotation. Even with regular washing, the wear and tear on just one towel will severely shorten its longevity.

Lastly it was also suggested that shake towel off, just like you shake your laundry out before you fold it, you should also shake your towels before you toss them into the dryer. This will help them to stay fluffy over time.

Conclusion:

As the result shows that very few women used hot water to disinfectant towels as hot water with detergent

is helpful in killing bacteria. About 30 per cent people wash their towels once in a month. Therefore it is the prime need of today that woman has to be made more conscious about hygiene practice of towels because dirty towels can carry a huge variety of microbes, and they've even been linked to spreading infectious disease. "We can't keep our towels hundred per cent germ-free, but can limit the grossest ones by washing towels"- experts says.

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