

# 6 Ways To Stop Mosquitoes From Feasting On You— And 6 Common Tactics That Just Don't Work

By [Markham Heid](#)

<http://www.prevention.com/health/stop-mosquito-bites>



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It's backyard barbecue season—but you're not the only one planning a feast. The mosquitos are out and ready to chow down. But before you fill another shopping bag with citronella candles, it's important to understand your adversary. Jonathan Day, PhD, a mosquito expert at the University of

Florida, knows how these insects operate. Here, he explains the dos and don'ts of repelling these pesky pests.



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### **Do: Blow them away**

Almost any breeze—anything above 1 MPH—makes it very difficult for mosquitoes to fly, Day says. If you can pick a breezy spot for your summer outing, that works. Plug-in fans are also a great deterrent, he adds. Just keep the flow of air directed at the lower half of your body; mosquitoes tend to fly very close to the ground to avoid wind, so directing the fan's force

downward will block their approach. (Check out [why mosquitoes love your particular blood type](#).)

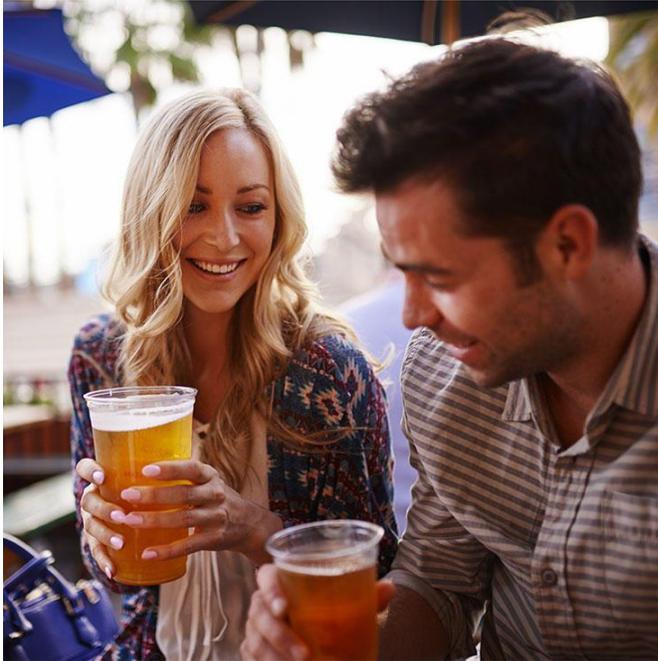


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### **Don't: Waste money on citronella candles and coils**

While citronella and other oils are natural insect repellants, Day says they only work if their scent or smoke gets between you and the mosquito. If you're lighting tiki torches that sit a few feet off the ground, they won't do much to keep the bugs at bay, he says. Even if you're surrounded by citronella candles or coils, Day says he seriously doubts they'd be effective.

(Instead, try incorporating these [mosquito-repelling plants](#) around your backyard.)



3/13 JOSHUA RESNICK/SHUTTERSTOCK

### **Do: Give your heart a breather**

Day says carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) is the primary thing mosquitoes search for to identify food sources. And when your heart rate is elevated, your body produces more CO<sub>2</sub>. From exercise to [drinking alcohol](#) or eating spicy foods, anything that cranks up your metabolic rate will increase your CO<sub>2</sub> production—and make

you irresistible to mosquitoes, Day says. (Unfortunately, being overweight or pregnant can also up your CO<sub>2</sub> output, he adds.)

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### **Don't: Swallow a particular food or supplement**

You may have heard that eating bananas, garlic, or supplements with B vitamins can repel mosquitoes. But Day says [none of these will do you any good](#).

5/13 LZFI/SHUTTERSTOCK

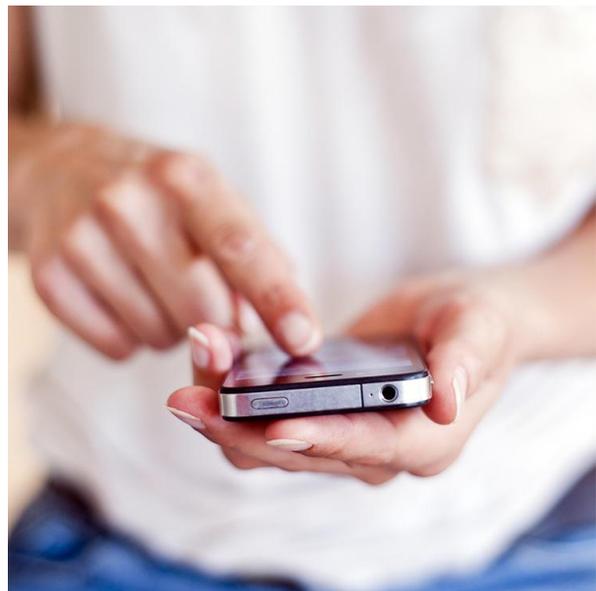
## Do: Buy tightly woven duds

Mosquitoes can't penetrate clothing that has a very tight weave, Day says. While cotton and linen typically aren't great armor against bug bites, Day says many synthetic fibers—particularly high-tech athletic apparel—tend to be woven tightly enough to keep mosquitoes out. Any garment that offers sun protection will also have a tight enough weave to block bites.

6/13 PCRUCIATTI/SHUTTERSTOCK

## Don't: Rely on ultrasonic devices

There are many ultrasonic devices and apps marketed as [mosquito](#) repellants—some of which claim to mimic the sound of dragonflies. "They don't work at all," Day says.



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## Do: Wear these colors

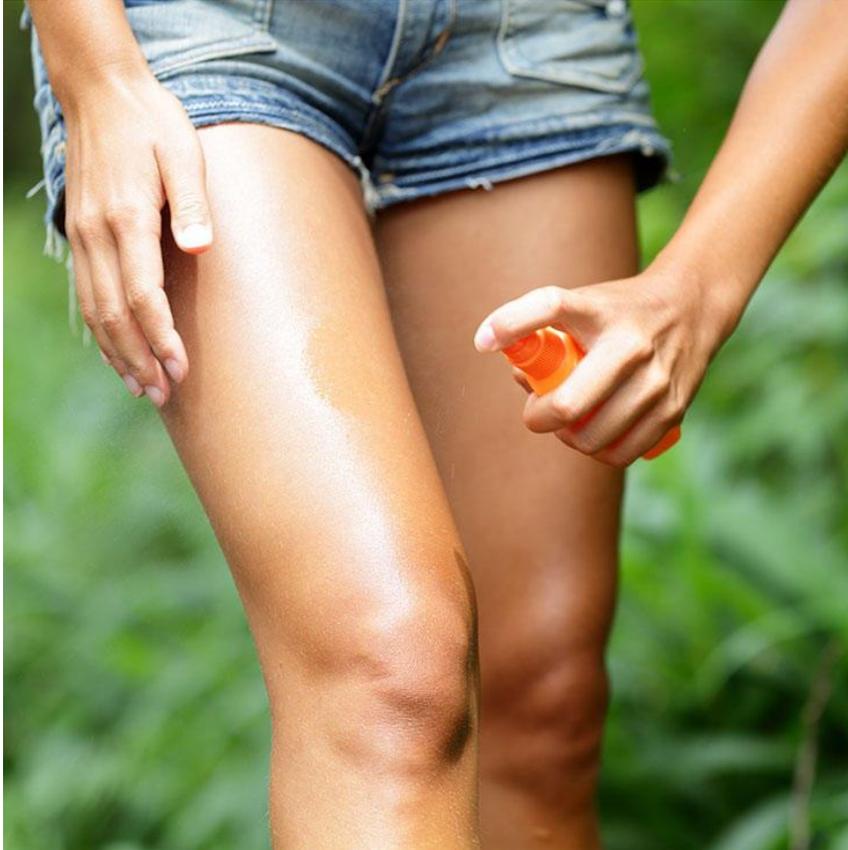
Mosquitoes use their vision to search for food sources during the daylight hours. And since they fly very close to the ground, they tend to find targets by looking for things that contrast with the horizon, Day says. "Dark colors stand out, but light colors are less attractive to them," he adds.



## **Don't: Rub mouthwash on your skin**

Some people say Listerine can repel mosquitoes because mouthwash contains eucalyptol, which is also found in some [bug repellants](#). Triclosan, another mouthwash ingredient, has also been linked to malaria prevention.

But research shows slathering yourself in mouthwash won't do much to ward off mosquitoes.



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## **Do: Rub on some DEET**

DEET has a bad reputation. But peruse the medical literature, and you'll find adverse reactions to it are rare—and tend to occur only when people swallow or snort the stuff. Like anything you rub on your skin, DEET can cause an allergic reaction in some people. But used as directed, it's basically harmless and extremely effective, Day says. But he's quick to add, "Most people don't understand how to apply it properly."

First of all, you should NOT spray DEET on your body and clothes like it's perfume, he stresses. Instead, squirt a little onto your hands and rub it onto your ankles, elbows, wrists, forehead, and all the other places where your skin is thin—and where mosquitos love to feed. Also important: Day says a product's DEET concentration determines how long it will last—not how well it will work. If you'll be outside for 90 minutes or less, he says a product with 7 to 10% DEET will do the job, and you can always reapply to extend its efficacy. DEET in lotion or wipe form is just as effective as a spray—and removes the risk of inhaling it.

## **Don't: Buy wristbands or other wearable DEET items**



Day says DEET works by blocking a mosquito's CO<sub>2</sub> receptors. That happens when a mosquito lands on your skin and comes into contact with the DEET. "They'll still land on you if you apply it," he says, "but they won't bite." Because DEET isn't a scent-based repellent, any form of it

that isn't spread on your skin won't work. So skip the wristbands, anklets, and other bogus DEET wearables, Day advises.



## **Do: Avoid peak mosquito hours**

Every boater knows big water tends to die down at dawn and dusk. That's because the wind typically

dissipates as the sun rises and sets. The lack of wind at those times also brings mosquitoes out to feed, Day explains. If you can schedule your outdoor outings at other times of the day, you'll sidestep a lot of bugs.



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## **Do: Resist the urge to scratch if you fall victim to a dreaded mosquito**

Going after that mosquito bite will only make it worse, since scratching adds to the inflammation. But unfortunately, a new study from Temple University suggests that our brains are basically conspiring against us to make sure we scratch.

To figure out why scratching feels oh-so-good, the researchers rubbed an itch-inducing plant on the arms of 10 people with chronic itch—defined as itchiness that lasts for more than 6 weeks (yikes)—and 10 healthy people. Then they scanned the participants' brains while they were allowed to (finally!) scratch that itch. While scratching away, both groups showed heightened activity in the reward centers of the brain, the areas that basically encourage us to keep doing what we're doing, whether it be fueling our bodies with food or propagating the species. It's not easy to ignore those impulses, which could be why it feels so torturous to leave that mosquito bite alone.

But even though your whole being is essentially commanding you to scratch, stay strong. Try some ice on the bite instead; it'll quiet some of the inflammation, reducing the urge to itch in the process. Or try these [remedies that stop the itch](#).

## Don't: Rely on a high-tech trap

The neon, electrical, bug-zapping mosquito traps of your youth have been souped up with fancy features like black UV light, which can attract even more insects than a regular light bulb, Day says.

Some even give off mosquito-attracting scents and heat to draw the insects to their demise, or require your active participation if you opt for the fly swatter-shaped variety. "There's no doubt that traps can—under the right environmental conditions—capture a lot of mosquitoes," Day says. Realistically, though, you can't catch 'em all.

"Over the last 30 years, there have been many traps marketed as being able to clear a one-acre or five-acre lot," Day says, "and it has never been my experience, even with very efficient traps, that they can rid a whole area of mosquitoes." A trap in the middle of your backyard will kill mosquitoes that fly close enough to sense its lures, sure, he says, but countless more will come flying into your yard to fill the space they leave behind. Mosquitoes are also adept at telling the difference between a trap and a living, breathing host, aka you. "They might come in toward the trap but then divert away and come right to you," Day says. "The running joke is that the best thing to do with a bug zapper is buy one for your neighbor."

