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## Etiquette Can Be Murder

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*It is very rude and an extreme violation of the rules of etiquette to make an engagement, either business or pleasure, and break it.*

Kali Coleman, “33 Old-Fashioned Etiquette Rules to Practice for Impeccable Manners” (bestlifeonline.com), 2016

### Ill Manners

I’m afraid I’ve had to break a lot of plans in the last couple of months due to illness. Nothing serious—just a new thyroid medicine that turned me into a bit of a zombie who could do nothing

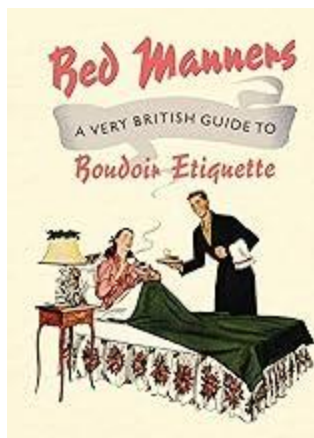


but eat and sleep. As etiquette maven Maralee McKee says in *Manners for When You or Someone You Know is Sick*, “It’s hard (to put it mildly)...when the medicine that is supposedly making us better feels like it’s trying to kill us.” And while I am definitely a good bit better after some adjustments to the dosage, I’m afraid this is going to be a very short newsletter. Not only because I am still struggling with brain fog, but because my etiquette books in general act as though illness does not exist, or that at least it is only something that happens to other people.

Most of my early etiquette books don’t mention illness at all, treating it as if it was something to be ashamed of. In fact, the *Essential Handbook of Victorian Etiquette*, which was adapted from the works of Thomas Hill published in 1873, mentions illness exactly twice: once to say that you should always give up your chair to an invalid, and once to state that you should never enter an invalid’s room unless you are specifically invited.

Letitia Baldrige’s *New Complete Guide to Executive Manners* from 1993 is a little more forthcoming, since it offers lists of appropriate gifts to send a sick co-worker. But neither it nor *The Amy Vanderbilt Complete Book of Etiquette* updated by Tuckerman and Dunnan in 1995 offer any suggestions on the etiquette of being sick yourself.





The only helpful advice I found in my collection at all was a rather tongue-in-cheek section of *Bed Manners: A Very British Guide to Boudoir Etiquette* first published in 1936 by Hopton and Balliol. That book offers a section on “How to be a Charming Invalid,” and immediately states that the task is impossible. It does offer some tips on criticisms a man should never offer to “his wife while she is trained-nursing him at home.” For example, you should never say “This soup tastes so good it must have come out of a tin,” or “These sheets must have come from a maker of emery cloth.” It is apparently best to stay on the good side of the person caring for you.

As for etiquette in hospitals, the book suggests that “If you can smile in a well-bred way when they come in, when night is blackest, to weigh you; if you never ring your bell; if you don’t expect the hospital to be interested in your case and your whims—why, you have all the bed manners you need to become a prime favorite in the very biggest modern hospital.”

Fortunately, the Internet offers more practical rules for 2024, in an article by Mirel Zaman at [Is It Rude to Lie About Being Sick? | POPSUGAR Fitness](#). Zaman indicates that you should give people you are going to see some advance notice when you are sick, mask up if you must fly on an airplane while contagious, and stay home from work when ill to get plenty of “good quality rest, hydration, and a balanced, nutrient rich diet.” And since that sounds pretty good to me right now, I’m going to follow her advice and sign off for a nap!

What are your best etiquette tips for taking care of yourself or others when you are sick? Drop me a line at [Contact - Lucinda Gerlitz](#) and let me know.

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## Latest News

Due to feeling very much like Sleeping Beauty, I haven’t done any writing or any marketing of my work this month. But if you know anyone who might be interested in signing up for my email list, please pass along my opt-in information at: [Newsletter - Lucinda Gerlitz](#).

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I would love for my readers to get in touch! You can drop me a note anytime on my contact page at [Contact - Lucinda Gerlitz](#).

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And for my usual animal photo, here is a picture of Izzie and Cricket doing what I’ve done best all month: curling up for a nice, long sleep.

