



Tips To Prevent Food Borne Illness

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With all the recent outbreaks occupying top headlines in printed and virtual media - from the Cyclosporiasis outbreak linked to iceberg lettuce to a multi-state Salmonella outbreak linked to fresh jalapeño peppers, it is a good time to take a closer look at food safety. With kids going back to school and morning lunch-packing-rush, it's important to know what to do at home to make sure your family is safe.

When an outbreak starts somewhere in the production process, impacting foods that we frequently eat raw (like iceberg lettuce, jalapenos but also spinach, peanut butter - just to recall past outbreaks) - there isn't much we can do to prevent it, with the exception of strictly following recall guidelines.

Little bugs, ready to start infection in our digestive systems, are everywhere and a massive outbreak is not needed for us to end up with serious digestive issues. So what to do?

Wash, Wash, Wash!

- Wash your hands very well. Two "happy birthdays" will do. You want about 20 seconds for the soap to work its magic and actually be able to wash most of the bacteria off.
- Wash your working surfaces often. This applies to countertops but also cutting boards, knives and any other tools you may use.
- Wash produce with warm running tap water. Do not use soap or other chemicals.
- DO NOT WASH eggs, poultry or meat, so that you don't splash bacteria from meat all over your kitchen.

Separate

- Use different cutting boards for meat and vegetables. Clean them very well especially after preparing raw meat, as this is the culprit of many food poisonings. To make it easier, cut washed raw and ready-to-eat items first like vegetables and cheese and raw meats last, so you are working from the cleanest to the most germy.
- Do not take raw meats out until you need them (for example, don't cut raw meat in direct proximity to your lettuce.)
- When shopping for raw meat in the store, place them in separate plastic bags and away from other items in your cart such as ready-to-eat raw foods. Also place away from items like tissues or medication to avoid package contamination.

Cook Properly

- Keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot. The “danger zone” or the zone where food bacteria multiplies most is below 40 degrees and above 140 degrees. Tip: keep cold and chilled foods below 40 degrees and hot foods above 140 degrees after they reach their safe cooking temperatures.
- *“It should be done by now”, “It looks done”, or “It was in the oven for 50 minutes”*, is what may give your family food poisoning. The temperature of cooked food is not an area where you want to play or guess. Get an accurate food thermometer and make sure foods are cooked to proper temperatures before you turn the heat off. Stick the thermometer into the thickest part of the meat and make sure it is not touching bone, gristle, or the cooking surface itself.

Cook To The Right Temperature

- Whole cuts of beef, pork, lamb or fish: 145°F (with a 3-minute rest time)
- Ground meats (beef, pork): 160°F
- All poultry (chicken, turkey): 165°F
- Leftovers and casseroles: 165°F

These temperatures ensure that food borne bacteria is killed and the food is safe to eat.

Chill

- Going from safe hot (above 140°F) to safe cold (below 40°F), your foods will have no choice but to travel through the danger zone. The shorter the trip, the safer your foods will be. Never leave perishable foods out for more than two hours - one hour if the outside temperature is 90°F or higher.
- Cool and chill cooked foods promptly. Packing them in shallow containers will allow them to cool faster. According to the CDC, it's ok to put small portions of hot food in the refrigerator as they will chill faster.
- Be especially vigilant with dishes containing animal products like meat or egg. Also items such as potato salad, cole slaw, dressings, or yogurt based dips will need your prompt attention.

If you'd like to learn more about food and nutrition counseling, please schedule an appointment with Inspire Dietician, [Agata Williams, RDN](#).