



Keep Food Safe For Seniors

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When you experience diarrhea, vomiting, an upset stomach, fever or stomach cramps, you may think you have the flu. But the real culprit may be harmful microorganisms called pathogens in the food you ate a few hours, a week, or even a month ago.

Long-term problems, such as kidney disorders, intestinal problems, and reactive arthritis, can result from foodborne illness. In more serious instances, certain bacteria may cause double vision, difficulty swallowing or breathing, and paralysis. Even death can occur. An estimated 3,000 people die each year as a result of foodborne pathogens.

Many people think that only food that looks spoiled, smells bad, or has an off-taste makes us sick. The truth is, food containing pathogens may look good, smell good, and taste delicious!

Many places of worship include food as a part of their traditions. These occasions may be potluck dinners for the congregation, money-making events such as spaghetti dinners, or providing food for the needy or senior citizens.

Unfortunately, foodborne illness can strike at any of these events. The information provided below will assist you in assuring that the food you serve is safe and wholesome.

Although any food can contain harmful organisms, some foods cause more problems than others. As a general rule, foods high in protein – meat, poultry,

fish, eggs, and dairy products – are more likely to cause problems. Also, foods like raw fruits and vegetables present more problems than the same item that is cooked.

Harmful microorganisms can be anywhere – in the air, on kitchen counters, on clean dishes, on and in the body, and in the food and water we consume. So if pathogens are everywhere and can be on any food, even if the food looks good, how can people protect themselves? Following the three simple, basic rules for handling food safely:

- Keep food hot
- Keep food cold
- Keep food clean

Some pathogens that make us ill are destroyed by heat. Most pathogens are killed when food is cooked well enough. Since protein foods are more likely to have disease-causing bacteria, cook them to a sufficiently high temperature. Many cookbooks list these internal temperatures. When food is refrigerated or frozen, microorganisms are not destroyed. They just don't multiply at refrigerated or frozen temperatures. When the food is removed from the refrigerator or freezer, the surface temperature begins to rise, making the conditions ideal for growth.

Microorganisms are easily transferred from one item to another. For example, pathogens can hitchhike from your hands to food, or from food to your hands, then onto another food. This transfer is called cross-contamination.

Many habits of improperly handling food we have learned over the years may contribute to an increased risk of foodborne illness without knowing it. Be sure to follow these tips to handle food more safely:

- Thaw food in the refrigerator a day or two before use.

- Cool food properly before putting it in the refrigerator. You can do this by either separating the food into smaller containers. Or you can submerge the food container in an ice bath.
- Keep hot food hot and cold food cold during serving. If a food is held at room temperature for more than two hours either reheat or refrigerate.
- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds before handling food or between handling different kinds of food. Be sure to use a disposable towel to dry your hands.

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