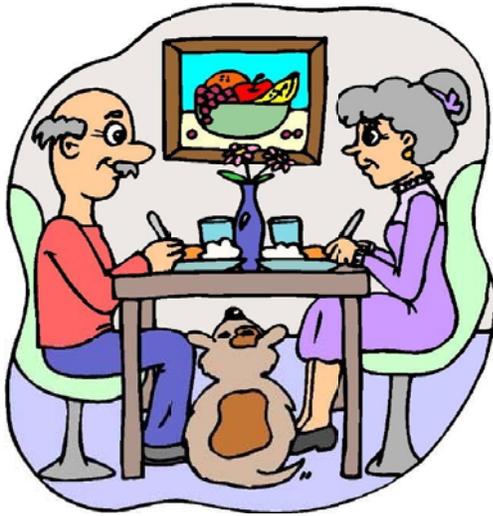


To Your Health! Food Safety for Seniors



Seniors have a lifetime of experience shopping, preparing and eating food. And fortunately, Americans enjoy one of the safest most healthful food supplies in the world.

But a lot has changed over your lifetime—from the way food is produced and distributed, to the way it is prepared and eaten. What is also changing is your ability to fight-off dangerous bacteria that may invade your body through the food you eat. The good news is that well-known saying — “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”— remains true.

Preventing the growth of dangerous microorganisms in food is the key to reducing the millions of illnesses and thousands of deaths each year. You may already know a lot about how to prevent illness from mishandled food. Federal studies show that seniors do a better job of handling food safely than any other age group. Even so, when it comes to staying safe, you can never know too much.

How Times Have Changed

A lot has changed over your lifetime—including the way food is produced and distributed. It used to be that food was produced close to where people lived. Many people shopped daily, and prepared and ate their food at home. Eating in restaurants was saved for special occasions. Today, food in your local grocery store comes from all over the world. And nearly 50 percent of the money we spend on food goes to buy food that others prepare, like “carry out” and restaurant meals.

Another thing that has changed is our awareness and knowledge of illnesses that can be caused by harmful bacteria in food. Through science, we have discovered new and dangerous bacteria that can be found in food—bacteria we didn’t even know about years ago. Science has also helped us identify illnesses that can be caused by bacteria in food—illnesses we didn’t recognize before. Today, for instance, we realize that some illnesses, like some kinds of arthritis, can be traced to foodborne illness. One of the other things that we know today is that some people—including people over 65—can be more susceptible to getting sick from bacteria in food. But seniors who take care to handle food safely can help keep themselves healthy.



Why Some People Face Special Risks

Some people are more likely to get sick from harmful bacteria that can be found in food. And once they are sick, they face the risk of more serious health problems, even death. A variety of people may face these special risks—pregnant women and young children, people with chronic illnesses and weakened immune systems and older people, including people over 65.

Why are seniors more susceptible to foodborne illness?

Everyone's health is different, including his or her ability to fight off disease. But immune systems weaken as we age. In addition, stomach acid also decreases as we get older—and stomach acid plays an important role in reducing the number of bacteria in our intestinal tracts—and the risk of illness. Plus underlying illnesses such as diabetes, some cancer treatments, and kidney disease may increase a person's risk of foodborne illness.

Recognizing Foodborne Illness

It can be difficult for people to recognize when harmful bacteria in food have made them sick. For instance, it's hard to tell if food is unsafe, because you can't see, smell or taste the bacteria it may contain. Sometimes people think their foodborne illness was caused by their last meal. In fact, there is a wide range of time between eating food with harmful bacteria and the onset of illness. Usually foodborne bacteria take 1 to 3 days to cause illness. But you could become sick anytime from 20 minutes to 6 weeks after eating some foods with dangerous bacteria. It depends on a variety of factors, including the type of bacteria in the food. Sometimes foodborne illness is confused with other types of illness. If you get foodborne illness, you might be sick to your stomach, vomit, or have diarrhea. Or, symptoms could be flu-like with a fever and headache, and body aches. The best thing to do is check with

your doctor. And if you become ill after eating out, also call your local health department so they can investigate. Foodborne illness can be dangerous, but is often easy to prevent. By following the basic rules of food safety, you can help prevent foodborne illness for yourself and others.



More Information

If you have questions and you'd like to talk to an expert, please call the following toll-free hotlines. You can reach the Food and Drug Administration by calling: 1-888-SAFEFOOD. The USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline is 1-800-535-4555. Or use your computer to get food safety information at www.FoodSafety.gov

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