



Center for Hygiene & Health in Home & Community March is National Nutrition Month!!

Nutrition and food safety have a lot to do with your health. The USDA's Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends eating a variety of fruits and vegetables each day. However, many commonly held beliefs about food preparation may actually be, at the very least misleading and at the worst, harmful to your health. How do you separate fact from fiction? We have debunked several food safety myths to help you select and prepare safer foods.



Food Safety Myths

Myth: If it tastes ok, it's safe to eat.

Fact: Relying on your sense of taste, smell or sight to determine if a food is safe could result in a food borne illness. Taking even the tiniest bite to "test the safety" of a questionable food can be quite dangerous and is not recommended.

Myth: I've always handled my food this way and have never gotten sick.

Fact: Past experience is not a good predictor for determining whether a food is safe. Our food system is changing and many foods travel an average of 1500 miles before it arrives in our kitchens. From field to plate, many hands and surfaces may have touched your food and opportunities for mishandling are high. Newly emerging and more virulent forms of bacteria provide further reason for taking precautions when prepare our food. Thirty years ago dangerous pathogens including E.coli O157, Listeria, and Campylobacter were not even known as sources of food-borne disease. However, the CDC estimates foodborne diseases now cause approximately 76 million illnesses, 325,000 hospitalizations, and 5,000 deaths in the United States each year.

Myth: I don't need to wash my hands before handling food because I use a hand sanitizer.

Fact: While hand sanitizers are very useful when soap and running water are unavailable, they only work well on skin that is free from soil. Use them when you can't get to a sink but otherwise, wash your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds, rinse with running water, and dry with a clean towel.

Myth: My vegetables are ready to eat because they have been cleaned by the water misters in the grocery store.

Fact: Grocery stores spray water on produce to make it look more appealing in an effort to increase sales. However, brief misting does not remove harmful bacteria or pesticides. Shoppers can also contaminate foods when they pick it up and then return it to the display. Germs can adhere to the surface of fruits and vegetables and it important that you wash produce in clean drinking water before eating. Even if you do not plan to eat the skins, it is important to clean these too because pathogens can be transferred from the surface to the inside when you cut produce, leading to cross-contamination. Follow these tips when selecting fruits and vegetables:



- Trust your senses
- Look for fresh-looking produce that is not bruised, shriveled, moldy, or slimy.
- Do not purchase anything that smells bad and avoid buying packaged vegetables that look slimy.

Myth: Washing food with soap is the best way to remove bacteria.

Fact: Do not use soap or detergents (these are also surfactants by the way) to wash fruits, vegetables products. Soap was not developed for us to eat and has not been approved by the FDA for cleaning food. What should you do instead?

- Rinse meats and fish with cold water just before preparing to cook. Washing meat is not recommended as it causes cross-contamination to sink and surrounds. Cook thoroughly.
- Wash vegetables that will be cooked in slightly warm water (between 80-110°F) to bring out their favor and aroma.
- Wash all vegetables and fruits that will be eaten raw, i.e. salad greens, in cold tap water which will help maintain crispness.
- Many important nutrients and fiber is contained in the skin of fruits and vegetables, rather than removing the skin scrub the skins clean.
- Berries and mushrooms have delicate skins and should be washed in a colander with a kitchen sink sprayer so as not to destroy the texture or over saturate them. If you don't have a sprayer, soak them very briefly in a bowl.

Myth: Special vegetable sprays are just expensive water.

Fact: There are a variety of vegetable wash sprays available in the market and online, many of which contain surfactants. Surfactants are cleaning agents that attach to oil and dirt and loosen water-resistant substances for quick removal. Pesticides and other agricultural chemicals are designed to be "waterproof" so they won't be washed away by rain and irrigation. Surfactants work with water by decreasing surface tension and creating a lift away action. Carefully read the label of vegetable sprays and choose only those with all natural, food grade ingredients such as citrus, corn, and coconut extracts.



Essential Food Safety Habits

There are four critical food safety messages recommended by the Partnership for Food Safety Education (PFSE), a not-for-profit organization formed by food scientists, health professionals, industry associations, consumer groups, and the U.S Government to educate us about safe food

handling. These four safety messages include:

CLEAN: Wash hands, utensils, and surfaces often. Wash produce just before you plan to use it, rather than when you put it away which cause it to lose nutrients more quickly.

SEPARATE: Don't cross-contaminate. Separate raw meat, poultry, or seafood from produce items both in your cart at the store and in your refrigerator.

COOK: Cook foods to proper *internal* temperatures.

CHILL: Refrigerate food promptly and quickly. When you get home put food away promptly.

For more information about these food safety tips visit PFSE's website at www.fightbac.org. Now that you're armed with food safety information, use your new knowledge in creating some tasty new dishes for your family and friends. The American Dietetic Association has provided some fun and nutritious recipes on its website which can be downloaded for free at:

<http://www.eatright.org/ada/files/Recipes.pdf>

These dishes will make a nutritious addition to any cook's recipe collection.