

Health Tips

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with

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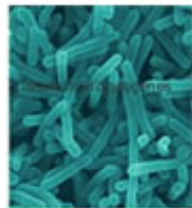
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Health Tip: Healthy Kitchens, Part 1

The Centers for Disease Control estimates that food-borne disease accounts for a shocking number of health problems: 76 million illnesses; 325,000 hospitalizations; and 5,000 deaths in the United States each year. A significant amount of this disease results from eating contaminated food in settings in which we do not have control over the food preparation, such as restaurants or pot-luck suppers. When preparing food in our own homes we are able to control sanitation practices, and should be able to virtually eliminate food-borne illness. With the holidays approaching, it is worthwhile to review some of the basic food safety measures and to look at some tips on improving kitchen hygiene.

Where does food-borne illness come from?



Listeria monocytogenes



Escherichia coli



L. Salmonella

Food-borne disease is caused by consuming contaminated foods or beverages. Among all illnesses attributable to food-borne transmission, 30% are caused by bacteria, 3% by parasites, and 67% by viruses. Some, like the noroviruses (formerly known as Norwalk-like virus) are spread by human-to-human transmission. Others, such as Salmonella bacteria, may be transmitted to humans by eating foods contaminated by animal feces or after becoming contaminated by contact with intestinal contents. Similarly, fruits and vegetables can be contaminated if they are washed or irrigated with water that is contaminated with animal manure or human

sewage.

The core four practices of safe food handling.

The Partnership for Food Safety Education, www.fightbac.org, describes the four essential practices to keep food safe from bacterial contamination as:

- Clean: Wash hands and food preparation surfaces often.
- Separate: Avoid cross-contamination. Raw meat, poultry and seafood should be kept away from ready-to-eat foods such as salads or raw vegetables.

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- Cook: Cook to proper temperature. This is best determined by using a meat thermometer.
- Chill: Refrigerate promptly. Cold temperatures slow the growth of harmful bacteria.

Our next two Health Tips will expand upon these safe food-handling practices, as well as offering some interesting, newer ways of improving kitchen sanitation.

Washing Fruits and Vegetables.



Many authorities believe that rubbing firm vegetables under tap water with a vegetable brush, or in the case of salads or more delicate vegetables, using running tap water alone is an adequate means of cleaning off contaminants. Because of the increasing problem of bacterial contamination others feel that this is inadequate to remove all of the bacteria that could be lurking on fruits and vegetables. A few years ago, a food scientist at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, developed a method for sanitizing

vegetables. Her system involves the use of two common "disinfectants", hydrogen peroxide and vinegar. In her method 3% hydrogen peroxide (the strength available at pharmacies for wound cleaning) and regular white or apple cider vinegar are placed in separate spray bottles. Following attention to the usual practices of hand washing and cleaning of food preparation surfaces, the two liquids are sprayed, one at a time, on the food that is being prepared and then rinsed with running tap water. This highly economical method killed pathogenic bacteria (Salmonella, Shigella, E.coli, Staph, etc.), more effectively than chlorine bleach or commercial sprays or washes sold for cleaning vegetables. Use of this combination of disinfectants has been shown to be an effective cleaning method for counter tops and cutting boards also. It should be noted, however, that the two liquids (hydrogen peroxide and vinegar) must be placed in separate spray bottles and not mixed. Mixing the two will produce peracetic acid, a chemical that is potentially harmful and may not be as effective as using the two liquids one at a time. It does not matter which one is used first and which one second. Be sure to rinse in running tap water to remove as much of the vinegar and hydrogen peroxide as possible.

Other tips for assuring the safety of fruits and vegetables are to:

- Wait until just before you eat or prepare your fruits and vegetables to wash them. Fruits and vegetables have natural coatings that keep moisture inside, and washing them will make them spoil sooner.
- Wash all pre-packaged fruits and vegetables, even if the label claims they are pre-washed.
- Wash all parts of your fruits and vegetables (orange rind, cucumber skin, etc.) even if you don't plan on eating them.

Since you can't see bacteria or viruses, even the most perfect appearing fruits

and vegetables from the grocery store, farmer's market, or from your own garden could be contaminated. Always wash them before you eat them or serve them to family members or guests.

Next week, we'll look at a few other tips for improving kitchen sanitation, including how to best clean kitchen sponges, how to tell if a hamburger is done, and how to properly defrost frozen foods.

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