



Preventing Foodborne Illness

Cooperative Extension Service • The University of Georgia College of Family and Consumer Sciences cooperating with the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences

What is Foodborne Illness?

We may know it by many names - upset stomach, flu or even "some kind of bug." What ever name we use, those symptoms of diarrhea and perhaps nausea, vomiting, fever, chills, aches and flu-like symptoms may be caused by something we ate. There are two main types of foodborne illnesses: (1) intoxication or "poisoning" and (2) infection. The symptoms we suffer depend on the type of illness and the particular organism that causes the problem.

Who is at Risk for Foodborne Illness?

Anyone can get foodborne illness. Certain groups, however, are more at risk than others. For example, infants and young children are more at risk than healthy adults because their immune systems that help them fight disease are not as fully developed as those of adults. The elderly are more at risk because their immune systems have weakened with age. People whose immune systems are not functioning properly, such as those suffering from cancer, AIDS or other diseases, are also more likely to get a foodborne illness than healthy adults. Pregnant women and their fetuses are more at risk for certain foodborne illnesses.

Is Foodborne Illness Serious?

Most foodborne illnesses are of short duration and are not life threatening. However, it is known that certain types of foodborne illnesses can have long-term health effects such as arthritic conditions, heart complications, kidney failure and central nervous system disorders. In some cases, foodborne illness may even cause death.

What Causes Foodborne Illness?

Foodborne illnesses are caused by certain types of bacteria and viruses. They can be associated with any food product that is carelessly handled, but are more often a problem with foods of animal origin.

Here are some examples of poor food handling practices:

- not washing hands before handling food
- not keeping utensils and food preparation areas clean
- not keeping raw products separated from cooked foods
- not cooling hot foods properly
- not thawing foods properly
- not cooking foods thoroughly to the proper temperature and without interruption
- not holding foods at the proper temperature.

What Can I Do To Prevent Foodborne Illness?

Keeping foods safe is easy if you follow a few simple rules.

Rule 1: Prevent food from becoming contaminated.

- Always wash your hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds before handling food.
- Clean utensils and work areas thoroughly and immediately after use by washing with hot, soapy water and rinsing. Next, use a mixture of 1 tablespoon household bleach per gallon of water to sanitize or reduce the number of bacteria that may be present to a safe level. Allow utensils such as knives and cutting boards to soak in this mixture for at least 1 minute.

- Keep raw foods separate from cooked foods. When storing items in the refrigerator, cover cooked foods and place them on the top shelves. Place raw products, especially meats, on the bottom shelves where juices cannot drip onto other foods.

- Foods to be cooled should be divided into smaller portions and cooled in shallow pans less than 3 inches deep. Place the hot foods directly in the refrigerator, but be careful not to overload the refrigerator with hot foods. This allows the food to cool more quickly.
- Serve foods safely by keeping cold foods cold (below 40°F) and hot foods hot (above 140°F).

Rule 2: Use temperature to control the growth of bacteria.

- Thaw foods in the refrigerator.
- Marinate foods in the refrigerator.
- Do not leave perishable foods like meats, egg dishes, poultry and sauces at room temperature for more than two hours.
- Cook and reheat foods thoroughly and without interruption. Use thermometers to test for doneness. Re-heat solid leftovers such as meat to 165°F and liquid leftovers such as soups to a rolling boil before serving. Eating certain foods raw such as eggs and shellfish can pose a food safety risk.

Preventing foodborne illness is simple when you handle foods properly. If you are unsure if foods are safe or how they have been handled, follow the most important rule of food safety:

When in Doubt, Throw it Out!

INTERNAL TEMPERATURES OF FOOD REQUIRED FOR SAFETY.

Check foods with a meat or test thermometer to make sure they are thoroughly cooked. Thorough cooking to the temperatures listed on this chart kills harmful bacteria.

RAW FOOD

INTERNAL TEMPERATURE

Ground Products

Hamburger		160°F
Beef, veal, lamb, and pork		160°F
Chicken and turkey		165°F

Beef, Veal, Lamb	medium-rare	145°F
Roasts and steaks	medium	160°F
	well-done	170°F

Pork Chops, roasts, ribs	medium	160°F
	well-done	170°F

Ham		160°F
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Fresh sausage		160°F
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Poultry


Chicken and whole pieces		180°F
Duck		180°F
Turkey (unstuffed)	Whole	180°F
	Dark Meat	180°F
	Breast only	170°F
	Stuffing (cooked separately)	165°F

Eggs

Fried, poached		Yolk and white are firm
Casseroles		160°F
Sauces, custards		160°F

Source: Fight BAC! Four Simple Steps to Food Safety. Partnership For Food Safety Education. Washington, D.C. (1998)

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