



Food Safety Facts

A Fact Sheet for People Who Prepare Food

The 60-Plus Set Faces Special Risks from Foodborne Disease

Bulletin #4089

You're over 60 and healthy, however, you face a greater risk of becoming sick from foodborne bacteria. Is that bad news?

No. Because you can take preventive measures by following the basic rules of food safety, whether you are eating at home or out.

Why do older people need to be a bit more careful?

As we get older, our body has less stomach acid, which limits our ability to fight bacteria found in food. Also, our immune system weakens with age, leaving many of us more vulnerable to food pathogens.

In addition, as we age our senses don't work quite as well. We can't necessarily rely on our sense of smell

to alert us that the meat is spoiled or the milk is sour.

Does that mean we need to worry about all the foods we love to eat? Not at all. We just need to adjust our habits to our bodies. Some of us need to start wearing bifocals in order to read. It may also be time to change some food habits in order to eat safely.

Protect Yourself When You Eat Out

People over 60 are on the go today. In fact, they eat out as frequently as any other segment of the population. Just remember these food safety tips next time you're ordering:

- Never eat raw or undercooked meat, poultry or seafood. For instance,

Mahmoud El-Begearmi, Ph.D.
Extension professor, nutrition and food safety

For more information about food safety, call USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline:
1-800-535-4555
10 a.m. to 4 p.m., weekdays, EST

steak tartare (a raw hamburger dish) and raw oysters are risky. Oysters can contain several dangerous bacteria and viruses.

- Avoid foods with undercooked or raw eggs. That includes Caesar salads, hollandaise sauce, some custards and chocolate mousse. If you're not quite sure whether the food contains undercooked eggs, ask the waiter or waitress, or just avoid it.

Eating Safely At Home

Improper thawing of frozen foods is a major cause of foodborne illness, particularly in older people. Foods should be thawed in the refrigerator, not on the counter. Food can also be safely thawed in the microwave or in cold water, as long as the water completely covers the food and is changed every 30 minutes. Food should not be left for more than two hours at room temperature (65 to 75 degrees F), or one hour when air temperatures are warmer.

Another common problem is keeping leftovers too long.

Use leftovers within three to four days or throw them out.

Finally, it is very important to keep your kitchen clean, including the cutting board. If juice from raw meat, poultry or fish is on the cutting board, bacteria from that unwashed board can make you sick when you use it to prepare other foods.

That holds true for anything—counters, utensils, hands—that contacts raw meat or fish. Wash utensils and surfaces with hot, soapy water after contact with these raw products before you use them again.

Lots of people like to use raw eggs in milk or eat soft-scrambled eggs. But raw and undercooked eggs have become an increasing source of salmonella infections. When you use eggs, make sure they are fully cooked, with no soft yolks or runny whites.

Adapted from Food News for Consumers, Spring 1990. Updated May 2002.

A Member of the University of Maine System.

Published and distributed in furtherance of Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914, by the University of Maine Cooperative Extension, the Land Grant University of the state of Maine and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. Cooperative Extension and other agencies of the U.S.D.A. provide equal opportunities in programs and employment.
6/02