Food Safety: the Answer to Preventing Food Borne Illness

Food borne illness is a serious matter. The Centers for Disease Control estimates there are 76 million cases of food borne illness in the United States each year, including 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths. Consuming contaminated food or beverages, which lead to infection or, less often, poisoning, causes food borne illness. As over 250 food borne diseases have been described, many possible symptoms exist, but common ones include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal cramping.

Two common bacteria that cause food borne illness are E. coli and Salmonella. E. coli can be transmitted through improper food handling, which includes not washing hands, or not washing raw vegetables and fruits before eating or cutting them. Raw fruit and vegetables may become contaminated if manufacturers wash them in low quality water, or from manure fertilizers. Salmonella is found in raw or undercooked foods such as poultry, eggs, dairy products, fish and shellfish, and meats, but can also occur through cross-contamination of foods. Protect yourself by following these tips.

**Protect yourself**

**Cook**
- Cook meat, poultry, fish, and eggs thoroughly.
- Use a thermometer to check the temperature of meats.
- Never taste marinade, and if you plan to use the remaining marinade for consumption, boil it first.

**Separate**
- Do not cross contaminate (do not let raw or cooked food touch a dirty surface).
- Place raw food items in separate sealed containers and bags.
- Place cooked food on a clean plate.
- Separate raw animal products in the grocery cart and in the refrigerator.
- Use separate cutting boards for meat and produce. If you use only one cutting board, clean it well before cutting different food items on it.
- Replace excessively worn cutting boards as bacteria can live in the cracks.

**Chill**
- Bacteria can grow quickly at room temperature.
- Refrigerate leftovers promptly.
- For faster cooling, store cooked food in small portions and in shallow containers.
- Thaw frozen foods in the refrigerator, not on the counter at room temperature.

**Clean**
- Wash hands, surfaces, and utensils with hot soapy water before and after handling food.
- When washing hands wash for at least 20 seconds.
- Change towels and dishcloths frequently, or use disposable towels.
- Wash produce under running water and try to cut off damaged parts, as bacteria thrive in these parts.
- Remove outer leaves of lettuce and cabbage.
- Wipe up refrigerator spills immediately.
- Avoid preparing food for others if you have a diarrhea disease.
- Keep pets off counters and away from food.

**Report**
- Report suspicion of food borne illness to the local health department. Often this is how food borne illness is first caught.
Cook food safely

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Cooking Temperature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ground Beef</td>
<td>At least 160°F (71°C); well done 170°F (77°C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roasts and Steaks</td>
<td>145°F (63°C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole Poultry</td>
<td>165°F (74°C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken Breasts</td>
<td>165°F (74°C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
<td>145°F (63°C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eggs</td>
<td>160°F (71°C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reheated leftovers</td>
<td>165°F (74°C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reheated sauces, soups, and gravies</td>
<td>Bring to a boil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping foods warm after cooking</td>
<td>Keep above 140°F (60°C)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Buy a thermometer for your home -

How long will a food item last?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food</th>
<th>In the refrigerator</th>
<th>In the freezer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meat: ground</td>
<td>1-2 days</td>
<td>3-4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat: steaks</td>
<td>3-5 days</td>
<td>4-12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roasts</td>
<td>3-5 days</td>
<td>4-12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pork: chops</td>
<td>3-5 days</td>
<td>4-6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bacon</td>
<td>7 days</td>
<td>1-2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoked breakfast link or patty</td>
<td>7 days</td>
<td>1-2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunchmeat (open/unopenened)</td>
<td>3-5 days/2 weeks</td>
<td>1-2 months for either</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish and seafood</td>
<td>1-2 days</td>
<td>Up to 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken or turkey (whole/parts)</td>
<td>1-2 days for either</td>
<td>1 year for whole 9 months for parts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheese</td>
<td>3-4 weeks</td>
<td>4-6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yogurt</td>
<td>Check date on the container; do not buy expired yogurt</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eggs (fresh in shell/hard-boiled)</td>
<td>3-5 weeks/1 week</td>
<td>Do not freeze/does not freeze well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eggs: liquid substitute (open/unopenened)</td>
<td>3 days/10 days</td>
<td>Do not freeze/1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television dinner</td>
<td>Keep frozen until ready to eat</td>
<td>3-4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooked egg dishes</td>
<td>3-4 days</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- If you are not sure about a food's safety, toss it out -

Store food safely

In the Cupboard
- Keep your cupboards and pantries clean, dry, dark and cool (50°F-70°F or 10°C-21°C).
- Organize your cupboards with older cans up front for first use.
- Be alert for signs of food spoilage (never use cracked, bulging, or leaking cans).
- Store opened food in dry, airtight containers.
- Store foods away from kitchen chemicals and waste.

In the Fridge
- Keep your refrigerator cold (no warmer than 40°F or 4°C).
- Do not over fill the refrigerator; cold air must circulate to keep foods fresh.
- Store all foods wrapped or in covered containers.
- Keep packages of raw meat, poultry, and fish in separate plastic bags, bowls or pans, on the lowest refrigerator shelf.
- Store food quickly, including hot foods, to lower bacteria multiplication.
- Refrigerate perishable foods within two hours of cooking or buying them.
Keep leftovers where you will see them.
Marinate foods in the refrigerator.

In the Freezer
- Keep your freezer cold (less than or equal to 0°F or -18°C).
- Store foods purchased frozen in their original packaging.
- Organize your freezer (place the oldest foods in front to use first).

For more information, check out the following Web sites and hotlines
USDA Food Safety Web site, search for food safety, food borne illness
US Food and Drug Administration Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition Web site, search for food safety, food borne illness, or contact the FDA's Food Safety Information Hotline at: 1-888-723-3366
USDA's Foodborne Illness Education Information Center Web site, search for food safety, food borne illness
USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service Web site, search for food safety, food borne illness, or contact the USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline at: 1-888-674-6854
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site, search for food safety, food borne illness

References
Fight BAC!® Graphics, Partnership for Food Safety Education Web site
Thermy™ graphics, Food Safety and Inspection Service, USDA Web site
Help with Cooking Web site

If you are a registered University of Illinois student and you have questions or concerns, or need to make an appointment, please call: Dial-A-Nurse at 333-2700

If you are concerned about any difference in your treatment plan and the information in this handout, you are advised to contact your health care provider.

Visit the McKinley Health Center Web site at: http://www.mckinley.illinois.edu