



**MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY**

Extension

Senior Health Line

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Common Foodborne Illnesses

Foods can become contaminated with organisms that can make us sick at many different times and places. The Centers for Disease Control estimates that 48 million people get sick each year from a foodborne illness. That is about one in every four people in the United States. Of those who do get sick, about 128,000 become ill enough to need hospitalization and approximately 3,000 die as a result of a foodborne illness. There have been more than 250 foodborne diseases identified, most of which are caused by bacteria, viruses or parasites, but there are also poisons and chemicals such as household cleaning solutions that can contaminate foods and make us ill. Here are some of the more common causes of foodborne illness.

Listeria bacteria can contaminate fresh produce especially cantaloupe, processed foods, raw milk and foods made from raw milk. It is also found in processed deli meats. If exposed to listeria, symptoms of the infection can occur from 2 days to 2 months after the exposure. To reduce the risk of developing foodborne illness associated with listeria, check food labels and be sure that dairy products are marked pasteurized. Wash raw produce well in fresh, potable water. Store all cut produce at 40 degrees F. or below. Do not keep deli meats or ready to eat foods past the use by date. Be sure to heat hot dogs to 165 degrees F. before eating, and be sure to clean everything including utensils and countertops that have come in contact with fresh produce.

Salmonella bacteria can contaminate a number of foods although we typically think of it as being associated with animal products, especially poultry. Chickens can contaminate eggs even before the shell forms. Salmonella outbreaks have also been traced to fresh produce such as hot peppers, tomatoes, salad greens, sprouts and papaya. Processed foods also carry the risk for salmonella infection. A large salmonella outbreak in 2008 and 2009 was linked to peanut butter and foods made with peanuts including granola bars and cookies. Raw meat, especially ground meat, is at risk for salmonella contamination. Typically there are no signs of contamination and thorough cooking is the best defense against salmonella from raw meats. Symptoms of salmonella are usually first seen within 12 to 72 hours after exposure to the bacteria. They usually last 4 to 7 days. To reduce the risk of salmonella illness, do not eat undercooked eggs or foods with undercooked eggs as an ingredient. Cook all poultry products to an internal temperature of 165 degrees F. Check for this temperature with an instant read thermometer. Solid muscles of beef, pork and lamb should be cooked to an internal temperature of at least 145 degrees F. while ground meats need to be cooked to an internal temperature of at least 165 degrees F for safety. Do not depend on the color of juices from the product. Keep raw poultry and meats separate from cooked products. Wash hands, cutting boards, utensils, platters and countertops after they have had any contact with raw poultry or meat. Thoroughly wash produce in fresh, running water before cooking or consuming raw.

Never consume a product that has been recalled. Return it to the store or discard it in a manner that no person, including a child or an animal can get to it.

E. coli lives in the intestines of cattle and can contaminate beef during slaughtering. Ground beef is at a higher risk for contamination because the bacteria can spread when the meat is ground. Other sources of E. coli contamination can include water or food infected from human feces, unpasteurized milk, juice, raw fruits and vegetables, and raw sprouts. Symptoms of E. coli infection develop several days after the initial exposure to the bacteria. Fresh produce can become contaminated with E. coli if fertilizer or water used while they were growing carries the bacteria. Leafy green vegetables are at high risk for contamination with E. coli bacteria. It is very important for everyone coming in contact with food to wash their hands every time they use the bathroom facilities to reduce the risk of E. coli infection to both themselves or others. Be sure to separate and individually wash all leaves of leafy green vegetables. Cook meats thoroughly. Do not place cooked meats back on a platter which held raw meat without washing it thoroughly with warm soapy water.

Campylobacter is the second leading cause of foodborne illness in the United States. It only takes one drop of raw chicken juice contaminated with campylobacter to bring on illness. While most people recover within a week from campylobacter infection, some people develop a serious illness as a result of campylobacter infection called Guillian-Barre syndrome a few weeks after the onset of symptoms. Guillian-Barre syndrome can cause temporary paralysis. To reduce the risk of campylobacter infections, and to avoid cross contamination, wash hands and all food contact surfaces after handling raw poultry. Be sure to cook poultry to an internal temperature of at least 165 degrees F.

Botulism is a rare but potentially fatal illness associated with improperly preserved foods,

honey and smoked or cured meats and fish. Never give honey to children under 12 months of age. Throw away any canned good that is dented, leaking, bulging or spurts liquid when opened. To can foods properly and reduce the risk of botulism and other foodborne illnesses, be sure to follow up to date, approved recipes and preserving methods.

Common symptoms of foodborne illness are nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps fever and diarrhea. Although anyone can get a foodborne illness, some people are more likely to develop infections. Those would be people with weakened immune systems from other medical conditions or treatments such as cancer treatments, liver disease, kidney disease, diabetes, organ transplants or HIV.

Beets and Sweets

6 medium beets, peeled and cut into chunks
2 Tablespoons olive oil, divided
1 teaspoon garlic powder
½ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon black pepper
3 medium sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks
1 Vidalia onion, chopped

Toss the beets with 1/2 Tablespoon of olive oil and spread on a baking sheet. Bake for 15 minutes at 400 degrees F. Meanwhile, mix the rest of the olive oil with the garlic powder, salt and pepper in a resealable bag with the onions and sweet potatoes. Seal the bag and shake to coat. Add the sweet potato onion mixture to the beets after the beets have roasted for 15 minutes and continue roasting for 45 minutes, stirring after 20 minutes. Serve hot. Makes 6 servings. Nutritional Value per serving: Calories 175, Protein 4 grams, Fat 5 grams Carbohydrate 34 grams, Sodium 448 milligrams