



# Health Beat

Monthly Insight on Health and Nutrition

## Food Safety

Food Safety is more than just washing our fruits and vegetables before we eat them. If we are not careful, bacteria can take up residence in not just our fruits and vegetables, but in our canned goods and kitchens as well. It is important to understand how to fight back against all those pesky bacteria that can cause food borne illnesses.

### **Q: How do I practice food safety in my own kitchen?**

A: Keeping your kitchen safe from germs and bacteria is a simple job. Wash your counter tops and sinks with soapy water or disinfectant before and after you use them to prepare foods, especially raw meat. The juices can leave behind bacteria that can cause food borne illnesses. It's



also best when handling raw meat to use paper towels instead of cloth towels; this way the paper towel can be tossed afterward. This will ensure that the dirty cloth doesn't get used to wipe down the counter, sink or another piece of food.

### **Q: How do I practice food safety while grocery shopping?**

A: Safe food shopping is the process of buying your cold and

frozen foods last and getting them home fast. Start shopping in the non-perishable aisles first and then move to the fresh produce, dairy, meat, and frozen foods last; and don't forget to leave a space in the cart for your meat, so it won't be on top of your other foods. Be sure to put raw meats, poultry and fish in their own plastic bags so that the juices don't leak onto the other foods. Last but not least, when buying canned goods, be sure to choose cans that are not dented or bulging. The dents and bulges can harbor bacteria.

### **Q: How do I practice food safety while at a picnic?**

A: Keeping your food safe while at a picnic is easy if you remember the three C's. Keep your food clean, cold and covered. Be sure to cover all raw meats when transporting them, this way the juices don't drip on other foods in the cooler; and keep raw and ready to eat foods along with their utensils separate from one another. Cross contamination is a very good way to spread bacteria. Keep as many food items on ice and in coolers as much as possible. Leaving foods out in temperatures over 90° F for longer than 1 hour provides a breeding ground for bacteria.

### **Q: How do I practice food safety while dining out?**

A: Be sure the restaurant you are dining at is up to code with food safety. Examine your plate to make sure there are no cracks in the glass or plastic and that the dishes and utensils are clean. Cracks in dishes can hide harmful bacteria in them.

## How's My Food Safety Score?

*For every answer of Yes give yourself 1 point.*

1. I always wash my hands with soap and warm water or use a sanitizing towel or liquid cleanser before eating or handling food.
2. I get my perishable food into the refrigerator within 30 minutes after shopping, especially in hot weather.
3. I put frozen or refrigerated foods in my grocery cart just before I check out of the store.
4. I put cooked meats in a clean container instead of the container that held the raw meat before I cooked it.
5. I wash my cutting board and utensils in hot soapy water after cutting raw poultry, fish or meat and before reusing to cut anything else.
6. My refrigerator thermometer always shows below 40° F and above 32°F
7. My freezer thermometer always shows 0°F or below.
8. I always cook ground meat products until they are well-done.
9. I always pay attention to the expiration date on food items and throw them out when necessary.
10. I always scrub or wash raw vegetables or fruits with running water before eating them.

### **How did you Score?**

- 10 – Excellent – Your kitchen is safe
- 8-9 – Good – You can improve
- Below 8 – Improvement needed

