

**HEALTH MATTERS - FOOD HYGIENE - PART 2**

This is my second article on food hygiene.  Food hygiene is especially important as the weather turns warmer - as bugs love the warm weather as much as we do.  These simple tips will help keep you and your family safe from some of the nasty germs out there.

**Washing Fruit and Vegetables**

It's advisable to wash all fruit and vegetables under cold running water before you eat them. This helps to remove visible dirt and germs that may be on the surface.  Peeling or cooking fruit and vegetables can also remove these germs.  Never use washing-up liquid or other household cleaning products, as they might not be safe for human consumption and you may accidentally leave some of the product on the food.

**Cleaning Up**

Wash all worktops and chopping boards before and after cooking, as they can be a source of cross-contamination. Bear in mind:

* The average kitchen chopping board has around 200% more faecal bacteria on it than the average toilet seat.
* Damp sponges and cloths are the perfect place for bacteria to breed.
* Studies have shown the kitchen sponge to have the highest number of germs in the home.
* Wash and replace kitchen cloths, sponges and tea towels frequently.

Whether putting food in the refrigerator, the freezer, or the cupboard, you have plenty of opportunities to prevent food-borne illnesses.

The goal is to keep yourself and others from being made unwell by bugs which can cause serious illnesses. Keeping foods chilled at proper temperatures is one of the best ways to prevent or slow the growth of these bacteria.

The following food storage tips can help you steer clear of food-borne illnesses.

**Storage Basics**

* Refrigerate or freeze perishables right away. Foods that require refrigeration should be put in the refrigerator as soon as you get them home. Stick to the ‘two-hour rule’ for leaving out at room temperature all items needing refrigeration. Never allow meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, or other foods that require refrigeration to sit at room temperature for more than two hours - one hour if the air temperature is above 32°C. This also applies to items such as leftovers, ‘doggie bags’, and take-away foods. Also, when putting food away, don't crowd the refrigerator or freezer so tightly that air can't circulate.
* Keep your appliances at the proper temperatures. Keep the refrigerator temperature at or below 5° C. The freezer temperature should be -18° C. Check temperatures periodically. Appliance thermometers are the best way of knowing these temperatures.
* Check storage directions on labels. Many items other than meats, vegetables, and dairy products need to be kept cold. If you've neglected to properly refrigerate something, it's usually best to throw it out.
* Use ready-to-eat foods as soon as possible. Refrigerated ready-to-eat foods - for example luncheon meats - should be used as soon as possible. The longer they're stored in the refrigerator, the more chance *Listeria*, a bacterium that causes illness, can grow, especially if the refrigerator temperature is above 5° C.
* Be alert for spoiled food. Anything that looks or smells suspicious should be thrown out. Mould is a sign of spoilage. It can grow even under refrigeration. Mould is not a major health threat, but it can make food unappetizing. The safest practice is to discard food that is mouldy.
* Be aware that food can make you very sick even when it doesn't look, smell, or taste spoiled. That's because food-borne illnesses are caused by bacteria, which are different from the bacteria that make foods ‘go bad’. Many organisms are present in raw or undercooked meat, poultry, seafood, milk, and eggs, unclean water, and on fruits and vegetables. Keeping these foods properly chilled will slow the growth of all bacteria.
* Following the other recommended food handling practices - cleaning your hands, surfaces and produce, separating raw foods from ready-to-eat foods, and cooking to safe temperatures as discussed last time - will further reduce your risk of getting sick.

More on food hygiene with my final article on this subject next time.

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That’s it for this week.  Until next time,

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