Dear Friends,

This issue of “Super Seniors News” will be dedicated to “National Food Safety Education Month®.” We will focus on how to make sure your food is safe and how to prevent foodborne illness.

Sincerely,

Jacquelyn W. Gibson
Extension Faculty-FCS

National Food Safety Education Month®

National Food Safety Education Month® (NFSEM) was created in 1994 by the National Restaurant Association Education Foundation (NRAEF), to heighten awareness of the importance of food safety education.

Safe and nutritious food is essential to your health and well being. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that each year 48 million Americans get sick from consuming contaminated foods, 128,000 are hospitalized, and about 3,000 of those persons die.

The major known cause of foodborne illness is bacteria or other food pathogens in food that are too small to be seen by bare eyes. The signs and symptoms of foodborne illness can range from diarrhea, fever, vomiting, and abdominal cramps, to more severe illness, such as paralysis, meningitis, or death.
Foodborne illness affects different people in different ways. For a strong, healthy person, foodborne illness can be mild, but for those who have limited ability to fight off disease, it can be a life-threatening situation. Infants and young children, older persons, and those who have compromised immune systems or chronic diseases are among the high-risk groups for foodborne illnesses, and should be especially careful with what they eat.

Foods that Seniors Should Avoid

There are some foods that can be dangerous for persons over 65, the USDA recommends you avoid the following:

- Raw or undercooked fish, shellfish, meat, and poultry
- Refrigerated smoked fish (for example, lox)
- Hotdogs, deli meats, and luncheon meats (unless these are reheated to 165 °F)
- Raw or unpasteurized milk and milk products
- Soft cheeses made from unpasteurized milk, including feta, brie, camembert, blue, and queso fresco
- Raw or undercooked eggs or egg product, as found in cookie dough, eggnog, and some salad dressings
- Raw sprouts
- Unwashed fresh vegetables including lettuce
- Unpasteurized juice from fruits and vegetables

Source: What’s On Your Plate? Smart Food Choices for Health Aging

Follow these Four Easy Steps to Food Safety:

1) Clean
2) Keep apart
3) Cook
4) Chill

Clean: Wash Hands and Counters Often

Germs can spread in the kitchen. They can get onto cutting boards, counters, sponges, forks, spoons, and knives.

Here’s how to fight germs:
- Wash your hands with hot, soapy water. Do this before touching food. Do it after using the bathroom, changing diapers, or touching pets.
- Wash your cutting boards, counter, dishes, forks, spoons, and knives. Use hot soapy water. Do this after working with each food item.
- Use plastic cutting boards. Do not use wood cutting boards. It is easier for germs to hide in wood. Wash all boards in hot, soapy water after use. Boards can go into the dishwasher too.
- Use paper towels to clean up kitchen counters and tables. If you use cloth towels, wash them often in the hot cycle of the washing machine or in hot soapy water.

Keep Apart: Keep Raw Foods to Themselves

Germs can spread from one food product to another.
- Keep raw meat, poultry, seafood and their juices away from other foods.
Keep these foods away from each other in your shopping cart and in your fridge.

Use a special cutting board for raw meat only.

Wash your hands after touching raw meat, poultry, or seafood. Wash cutting boards, dishes, forks, spoons, and knives that touch these foods. Use hot, soapy water.

When you use a plate for raw meat, poultry, or seafood, don’t put any other food on it until you wash it.

Cook: Make Sure Food is Very Hot

Foods need to get hot and stay hot when you cook them. Heat kills germs.

Use a clean cooking thermometer. This handy tool tells you how hot a food gets inside. It helps you to know when foods are cooked all the way. Use it for meat, poultry, and other foods.

Cook roasts and steaks to at least 145 degrees F. Whole poultry should reach 180 degrees F. Cook ground beef to at least 160 degrees F.

Cook eggs until the yolks and whites are firm. Don’t use recipes in which eggs remain raw or are partly cooked.

Cooked fish should flake easily with a fork.

Be careful if you use a microwave oven. Make sure that the food has no cold spots. Cold spots let germs live. Cover the food and stir it for even cooking. Rotate the dish once or twice while cooking.

Bring sauces, soups and gravy to a boil when you reheat them. Heat over leftovers well, too. Leftovers should reach 165 degrees F.

Chill: Put Food in the Fridge Right Away

Set your fridge to 40 degrees F or colder. The cold helps slow the growth of germs in food. The freezer unit should read 0 degrees F. Check the readings once a month with a fridge thermometer.

Put all cooked food and leftovers food in the fridge or freezer within two hours.

Never thaw food by simply taking it out of the fridge! There are three safe ways to thaw food:

1. in the fridge
2. under cold running water
3. in the microwave

Marinate foods in the fridge.

Divide large amounts of leftovers. Put them into small, shallow dishes with covers. That way, they can cool quickly in the fridge.

Don’t pack the fridge too full. The cool air must flow freely to keep food safe.

To Learn More . . .

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
Meat and Poultry Hotline 1-800-535-4555

U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
Food Information Hotline 1-800-SAFE FOOD

Partnership for Food Safety Education
www.fightbac.org
www.foodsafety.gov
Healthy Eating: Food Storage Guide
Linda B. Bobroff and Jennifer Hillan

If you don't shop for groceries often, you may want to buy food that will last until your next trip to the store. The following storage guidelines for perishable foods will help you decide how much food to buy when you visit the grocery. Keep in mind that safe storage times depend on the condition of the food when you purchase it and your refrigerator temperature and humidity. Check foods often for any signs of spoilage.

Tip: Store fruits and vegetables (except bananas, potatoes, and tomatoes) in the crisper drawer of your refrigerator, and keep your refrigerator at or below 40°F. Bananas, potatoes, and tomatoes store best at room temperature. It is best to store fruits separate from vegetables.

Table 1. Storage guidelines for selected perishable foods

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References

HOME FOOD SAFETY

2016

MYTHBUSTERS
MYTH:

“Leftovers are safe to eat until they smell bad.”
There are many different types of bacteria, some of which cause illness in people and others that don’t. The types of bacteria that cause foodborne illness do not affect the taste, smell, or appearance of food.

✔ Freeze or toss refrigerated leftovers within 3-4 days even if they smell and look fine.

✔ If you’re not sure how long leftovers have been in the refrigerator, toss them. If you’re not sure how old your leftovers are, remember: when in doubt, throw it out!
"Freezing food kills harmful bacteria that can cause food poisoning."
Bacteria can survive freezing temperatures. Freezing is not a method for making food safe to eat.

When food is thawed, bacteria can still be present and may begin to multiply.

- Cooking food to the proper internal temperature is the best way to kill harmful bacteria.
- Always read and follow the package cooking instructions
- Use a thermometer to measure the internal temperature of cooked foods.