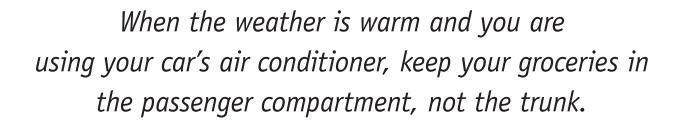# Start at the Store:

7 Ways to Prevent Foodborne Illness

Safeguarding your home against foodborne illnesses begins not at home, but at the supermarket, grocery store, or any other place where you buy food that you plan to store and serve.

1. **Check for cleanliness.**

2. **Keep certain foods separated.**

3. **Inspect cans and jars.**

4. **Inspect frozen food packaging.**

5. **Select frozen foods and perishables last.**

6. **Choose fresh eggs carefully.**

7. **Be mindful of time and temperature.**

When the weather is warm and you are using your car's air conditioner, keep your groceries in the passenger compartment, not the trunk.

Combating foodborne illnesses is a top priority at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). That's because, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), foodborne ailments cause about 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,200 deaths nationwide each year.

You as a consumer can play a key role in preventing these illnesses. While shopping for food, you should

1 Check for cleanliness.
Buying from a retailer who follows proper food handling practices helps assure that the food is safe. Ask yourself: What is the general impression of this facility? Does it look and smell clean?

2 Keep certain foods separated.
Separate raw meat, poultry, and seafood from other foods in your grocery shopping cart. Place these foods in plastic bags to prevent their juices from dripping on other foods. It is also best to separate these foods from other foods at checkout and in your grocery bags.

3 Inspect cans and jars.
Don't buy food in cans that are bulging or dented. Also, don't buy food in jars that are cracked or have loose or bulging lids.

Since foods sold in cans or jars are processed to be sterile, they can "keep" for a long time if the can or jar is intact. A bulging can or jar lid may mean the food was under-processed and is contaminated. A dent in a can, especially if the dent affects a seam, may cause an opening in the seam

which may allow contamination, as would a crack in a jar. A loose lid on a jar means the vacuum has been lost and the product may be contaminated. Don't buy a food product whose seal seems tampered with or damaged.

4 Inspect frozen food packaging.
Don't buy frozen food if the package is damaged. Packages should not be open, torn or crushed on the edges. Also, avoid packages that are above the frost line in the store's freezer. If the package cover is transparent, look for signs of frost or ice crystals. This could mean that the food in the package has either been stored for a long time or thawed and refrozen. In such cases, choose another package.

5 Select frozen foods and perishables last.
Meat, poultry, fish and eggs should be the last items placed in your shopping cart. Always put these products in separate plastic bags so that drippings don't contaminate other foods.

6 Choose fresh eggs carefully.
Before putting eggs in your cart, open the carton and make sure that the eggs are clean and none is cracked. Buy only refrigerated eggs and follow the "Safe Handling Instructions" on the carton.

7 Be mindful of time and temperature.
It's important to refrigerate perishable products as soon as possible after grocery shopping. Food safety experts stress the "2-hour rule"—because

harmful bacteria can multiply in the "danger zone" (between 40° and 140° F), perishable foods should not be left at room temperature longer than 2 hours. Modify that rule to 1 hour when temperatures are above 90° F, as they often are in cars that have been parked in the sun.

If it will take more than an hour to get your groceries home, use an ice chest to keep frozen and perishable foods cold. Also, when the weather is warm and you are using your car's air conditioner, keep your groceries in the passenger compartment, not the trunk. **FDA**

For More Information
FDA Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (CFSAN): Foodborne Pathogenic Microorganisms and Natural Toxins Handbook
www.cfsan.fda.gov/~mow/intro.html

Information for Consumers and Health Educators
www.cfsan.fda.gov/~lrd/advice2.html

Foodborne Illness
www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/qa-topfd.html

USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service: Reporting Problems with Food Products
www.fsis.usda.gov/Fsis_Recalls/ Problems_With_Food_Products/ index.asp

Report Non-Emergencies About Food to FDA
www.fda.gov/opacom/backgrounders/ complain.html