



# Senior Series

A partnership between Ohio State University Extension  
and Ohio Aging Network professionals



For more information, visit the Ohio Department of Aging web site at: <http://www.goldenbuckeye.com>  
and Ohio State University Extension's "Aging in Ohio" web site at: <http://www.hec.ohio-state.edu/famlife/aging>

## Reducing the Risk of Food Borne Illness

Food poisoning affects millions of Americans each year. Common symptoms are similar to the flu and may include headache, nausea, fever, stomach cramps, and diarrhea. Symptoms may appear within a few hours to a few days after eating. There are four groups of people that are considered to be at higher risk of food borne illness: young children, senior adults, pregnant women, and immune suppressed individuals (such as patients undergoing chemotherapy and organ transplants). These four groups make up about 20% of the population.

Senior adults are at higher risk for several reasons related to the aging process. The immune system's ability to fight infection declines with age. The stomach becomes less acidic, which limits the body's ability to fight food borne illness. Sensory organs also change, which may reduce the ability to detect spoiled food by smell or sight.

### What Causes Food Borne Illness?

Food borne illnesses are caused by eating food that contains certain types of bacteria or viruses. After the food is eaten, the microorganisms continue to multiply in the digestive tract, causing an infection. Bacteria growing on food may have produced a toxin that causes illness when eaten.

The bacteria that cause food borne illness are everywhere. We cannot keep them out of our foods. However, food borne illness may be prevented if we follow food safety guidelines.

### How to Keep Food Safe

The ways we prepare, cook, serve, and store food can increase or decrease the risk of food borne illness. The following five principles will help your keep food safe.

### ***Keep It Clean***

Wash hands with warm, soapy water before handling any food. Rewash hands after using the bathroom, touching your face or hair, or sneezing.

### ***Keep It Separate***

Avoid cross-contamination by using separate utensils and cutting boards to cut up raw meats, poultry, seafood, and eggs. Wash utensils and cutting surfaces with hot, soapy water before and after each task.

Don't use the same plate for cooked meat that was previously used for raw meat. Use clean plates for serving.

### ***Cook***

Thaw frozen foods in the refrigerator or microwave oven. Do not thaw on the counter. Use only pasteurized milk and fruit juices. Cook foods to proper temperatures. Thoroughly cook meats, poultry, seafood, and eggs. Use a meat thermometer to check temperatures.

### ***Serve***

Serve hot foods hot (about 140 degrees) and cold foods cold (below 40 degrees). Bacteria grows best in the danger zone, 40 degrees–140 degrees. Heat leftovers to at least 165 degrees.

### ***Store***

Never leave perishable foods at room temperature longer than two hours. If the temperature is above 90 degrees, the time limit is one hour. Refrigerate leftovers promptly. Store foods in leakproof containers. Cool foods such as soups and stews quickly by refrigerating in shallow pans.

## **Finally**

When in doubt—throw it out! Never taste food that you are unsure about.

## **References**

Foodborne Illness: Guess Who Came to Dinner? HYG-5570-98.

4 Tips on Food Safety in the Home, Ohio Food Industry Foundation.

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