

Keeping You and Your Food Safe

Kitchen and Food Safety Tips

It's a Fact of Life

As we age, we just don't function physically like we used to. Changes in digestion, vision, reflex time, healing time, physical strength, and mobility, among others, affect things we do every day to take care of ourselves. On the positive side of aging, however, is another fact: we get smarter. Well-placed instructions or reminders can be most efficient tools in avoiding injury or illness to those who are wise enough to recognize their value.

Another fact of life is that the kitchen can be a dangerous place. The potential threat to health posed by appliances, sharp-edged implements, chemicals for cleaning, and food contaminants are amplified by the physical changes brought on by aging. Adding a little wisdom to your routine could prevent a costly kitchen-related illness or injury.

Lighting

Overall, we require more light to see adequately as we age. Make sure all light fixtures in the kitchen are in optimum working order and equipped with bulbs of appropriate wattage. Have extra fixtures installed in dark spaces if necessary. It is particularly important that work areas and walkways be brightly lit. The visual inspection of food-contact surfaces and of the food itself, correct identification of products, reading instructions on household chemicals, and avoiding contact with sharp edges require adequate light.

Sharp Objects

Using implements that have been allowed to become dull cause more accidents than sharp ones. See that knives and can openers are sharpened regularly and operate smoothly. Replace rusted implements. Gripping power is

one of the physical attributes that may decline with age. It is especially important that the handles on cutting instruments be tightly attached to the implement and comfortable to the hand to ensure maximum control during its use. Kitchen implements with specially designed handles to accommodate a weak grip are available in catalogs or by contacting the Arthritis Foundation.

Burns

Burn injuries can result from contact with stove-top heating elements, the interior of ovens, steam from boiling food, or touching hot utensils. Decreased reaction time and mobility that accompany aging intensify the threat of burns. Using a kitchen towel for a hot pad or oven mitt is dangerous because damp towels can cause a steam burn, and unfolded edges of towels can catch fire if allowed to make contact with a hot element. Buy good quality hot pads and keep them nearby as you prepare meals.

Prepare foods in quantities that you can handle comfortably. Large pots filled with large quantities of food can be too heavy to carry, and you could burn yourself or others if the pots fall or are dropped.

Keeping Food Safe

Bacteria and humans have coexisted a long time. Humans have developed systems to minimize the harmful effect that some microorganisms can have on

our health. Unfortunately, these systems decline in efficiency as we age. Increased susceptibility to the effects of food borne bacteria and their toxins due to changes in stomach acidity levels and a general suppression of the immune system contribute to the increased risk of food-related illness to seniors. The smaller family unit in which seniors may live alters the way food is handled. Some guidelines for safe food handling bear repeating in the light of this.

Cooking for one or two usually means that there will be portions of prepared food left over. Promptly refrigerate these in clean, shallow containers. Keep the refrigerator clean. Set the thermostat between 35 and 40 degrees F; harmful bacteria find it hard to grow at this temperature. Reheat foods to 180 degrees F to eliminate bacteria that may have survived during the cooling process.

Freezing is a convenient way to store food for one or two people. Thaw these items in the refrigerator, microwave oven, or under cold running water, and cook them thoroughly. Use a thermometer for checking internal food temperatures.

Cross-contamination happens when plates, utensils, towels, or hands that have been in contact with raw food are allowed to come in contact with cooked food or other food surfaces without washing. Potentially harmful bacteria have sometimes been associated with poultry, meat, and raw eggs. It is essential that these products be handled

thoughtfully so that the threat of cross-contamination is minimized. Keep the work area clean by frequent wiping with paper towels. Do not forget the faucet handles.

Carry home cold foods from the grocery store in insulated containers, especially in warm weather. Likewise, when you purchase hot food from grocery store delicatessens or carry out restaurants, it is important to consume or

refrigerate them soon after purchase. Bacteria thrive in food between the temperatures of 40 degrees F and 140 degrees F; keep your food out of this “danger zone” as much as possible.

Finally, clean hands are essential to handling food safely. Wash your hands before and frequently during the preparation period. There is no substitute for the fundamentals of safe food handling practices. Your health depends on it.

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