

Summer Food Safety

The incidence of food borne illnesses increases in the summer. It isn't hard to figure out the reasons. Bacteria love the hot, humid days of summer. At picnics, barbecues, and during travel, we're more likely to leave food unrefrigerated for longer time periods. When cooking outdoors, we may leave the food thermometer in the kitchen instead of using it at the grill. Adequate places to wash hands and equipment are often not readily available at many outdoor sites. All of these factors create risky situations and can result in flu-like symptoms or side effects that are more serious. Some careful planning during the summer can help you keep your family and friends safe.

Unwashed hands are a prime cause of food borne illness. Whenever possible, wash your hands with warm, soapy water for 20 seconds before handling food. Be sure to pack disposable towelettes, especially if you will be at a location without handwashing facilities.

Perishable foods pose a great risk, too. This includes cooked vegetables, fresh fruits and vegetables that are peeled or cut, cooked pasta and rice, dairy products, eggs, meat, poultry, and seafood. It is imperative that you keep them cold.

When running errands, make the grocery store your final stop, and while you're there purchase perishable foods last. A cooler with an ice block in it is the safest way to transport perishable food home. Once you are home put the perishable foods away immediately.

If you are leaving home for a picnic, keep perishable foods cool by transporting them in a cooler with ice or frozen gel packs. Refrigerate the picnic foods, dishes like potato salad or fruit salad, overnight and, just before you leave home, pack the cooler with the chilled foods. Remember, a full cooler will maintain its cold temperatures longer than one that is partially filled so pack plenty of extra ice or freezer packs to ensure a constant cold temperature.

When possible, use two coolers. Keep beverages in one cooler and perishable food in the other. Avoid frequently opening the cooler containing the food since this raises the temperature. Keep the cooler in the air-conditioned vehicle for transporting and then shade or shelter it at the picnic site.

Throw away any perishable leftovers that have been kept out over two hours (one hour if the temperature is above 90°F).

Avoid cross-contamination. Don't place cooked meat, poultry, or seafood on the same plate you used to carry it to the grill. Always use a clean plate for cooked foods. In the cooler be sure to keep raw meat, poultry and seafood in separate containers, away from cooked foods or foods meant to be eaten raw such as fruits and vegetables.

Although only the inside of melons is eaten, their outer rinds still must be washed. Bacteria present in the soil can contaminate the skin of the melon. When the watermelon or cantaloupe is cut, these bacteria are transferred to the edible part and can grow to levels that cause food borne illness. Wash the surface of melons thoroughly under clean, running water before cutting and eating them.

Rather than worry about keeping hot foods hot and cold foods cold, limit the number of perishable foods on your menu, especially if you'll be at a picnic site or cookout for several hours. For example, serve washed whole fruit (apples, oranges, bananas, plums, or peaches) instead of a cut-up fruit salad. Try cookies and brownies instead of a perishable cream-filled pie.

Good food safety is easy to practice. By following a few simple steps, you and your family can have worry-free picnics and backyard barbecues.

Below are summer time recipes featuring summer ingredients prepared in a light, guilt-free way from <http://www.extension.org/pages/28534/perfect-summer-recipes>. Enjoy!

Peppered Kabobs

1 package top blade steaks (2 pounds), take seam out of each steak and cut into 1 inch cubes
4 onions, cut into quarters
20 cherry tomatoes
1 teaspoon salt
1 ½ teaspoon pepper
3 tablespoons balsamic vinegar

Soak wooden skewers in water for 30 minutes. Place cubes of blade steak, onion quarters, and cherry tomatoes on skewers in alternating pattern. Place in pan; salt and pepper the skewers, rotating the skewers. Pour the balsamic vinegar over the skewers. Let marinate for a minimum of 10 minutes. Cook over grill to desired doneness. Yield: 10 servings

Nutrition Information per kabob: 170 calories; 10g total fat; 3.5g saturated fat; 119mg sodium; 2g total carbohydrate; 17.3 g protein

Lemon-Pepper Summer Vegetables

2 zucchini, cut into 1/2-inch rounds
2 squash, cut into 1/2-inch rounds
1/2 bunch broccoli florets (about 1 cup), cut into bite-size pieces
1 tablespoon canola or olive oil
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon black pepper, divided
2 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon lemon juice

Preheat oven to 400°F. Place vegetables in a 13x9-inch baking dish. Drizzle with oil and add salt, 1/2 teaspoon black pepper, and 2 tablespoons lemon juice. Toss to coat. Roast for 30 minutes, stirring after 10 minutes. Before serving add 1/2 teaspoon black pepper and 1 teaspoon lemon juice.

Yield: 6 servings, 1/2 cup each

Nutrition Information per serving: 60 calories; 4g total fat; 0.5g saturated fat; 125mg sodium; 5g total carbohydrate; 2g protein

Apple Carrot Salad

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| 1 cup carrots, shredded | ½ c. raisins |
| 3 apples, unpeeled and diced | 1 c. low-fat mayonnaise |
| 1 T. lemon juice | lettuce (optional) |

Combine all ingredients in a large bowl; chill thoroughly. Serve on lettuce, if desired. Yield: 6 servings

Nutrition Information Per Serving: 110 calories; 1g total fat; 0g saturated fat; 0mg cholesterol; 140 mg sodium; 25g total carbohydrate; 3 g dietary fiber; 20g sugars; 1g protein

Cucumber Tomato Salad

1/2 cup rice vinegar or white vinegar
3 tablespoons non-nutritive sweetener or sugar
3 cups unpeeled cucumbers, sliced thick and quartered (about 2 medium)
2 cups chopped tomato (about 1 large)
1/2 cup chopped red onion
Salt and pepper to taste

Combine vinegar and sugar. Add cucumbers, tomato and onion. Season to taste with salt and pepper; mix well. Refrigerate covered, at least 30 minutes before serving. Yield: 6 servings

Nutritional Information per 1 cup serving: 26 calories; 1g protein; 6g carbohydrates; 0g Fat; 0 mg cholesterol; 1g dietary fiber; 7g sodium

Italian Vegetable Salad

2 cups rotini pasta, cooked & cooled
1 medium green pepper
1 large tomato
1/2 cup sugar snap peas
15 oz. can small black olives, drained

6 oz. jar artichoke hearts, drained
2 tablespoons pine nuts
1 tablespoon capers
1/4 cup zesty Italian dressing

Chop pepper, tomato and snap peas. Combine with remaining ingredients and stir. Refrigerate or keep cool.

“Salsy” Zucchini

3 pounds zucchini
1 jar salsa – medium hot (or your favorite amount of heat!)
Sliced or grated cheddar cheese

Wash and slice zucchini into a shallow casserole. Pour salsa over top, stirring slightly. Top with cheese. Bake at 350°F for 35 – 45 minutes.

Potato Salad

2 cups potatoes, cubed
1/2 cups celery, chopped
1 tablespoon mustard
2 tablespoons pickle relish
1/4 cup onion, chopped

1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 cup green bell pepper, chopped
1/2 teaspoon pepper
1/4 cup low-fat salad dressing
1 teaspoon dill weed

In a large saucepan, place potatoes and cover with water. Cover and bring to a boil. Simmer until potatoes are tender. Remove from heat, drain potatoes, and cool completely. In a large bowl, combine potatoes, celery, onion, and bell pepper. In a small bowl, combine salad dressing, mustard, pickle relish, salt, pepper, and dill weed. Add salad dressing mixture to vegetables and stir gently until coated evenly. Refrigerate at least 1 hour before serving. Yield: 6 servings

Nutrition Information per Serving: 80 Calories; 2g total fat; 0g saturated fat; 5 mg cholesterol; 390 mg sodium; 13g total carbohydrate; 2g fiber; 4 g sugars; 1g protein

Sources include University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension at <http://liferaydemo.unl.edu/web/safety/home>
Partnership for Food Safety Education at www.fightbac.org and www.usda.gov

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