

Preventing Food Poisoning



Don't let unsafe food ruin your gatherings. By following simple food safety practices, you can ensure everyone enjoys the celebrations without health worries.

Foodborne illness, caused by harmful germs such as bacteria, viruses, and parasites, can sneak into your food and make you sick. These germs produce toxins that can't be seen or tasted. Dr. William Alexander, who studies food-borne illnesses, says, "The hardest part is that these germs are invisible and tasteless."

Germs can enter food in many ways. Some foods, like raw meats, eggs, and even fruits and vegetables, may already have harmful germs when they are gathered or brought home. To protect yourself, wash your produce thoroughly and cook food to the right temperatures.

If the people who prepare food don't have clean hands or use clean utensils and surfaces, germs can spread to your food. That's why washing your hands and cleaning the area where food is prepared is important—especially when cooking for a community event.

Leaving food out in the heat or not storing it properly can allow germs to grow and spread. So, make sure food is kept at safe temperatures to prevent contamination. Always follow food safety guidelines, especially when preparing for large gatherings or feasts.

When too many germs enter your food or water, they can cause sickness. The symptoms can vary, depending on the type of germ or toxin and how much you consume. Common signs include diarrhea, stomach pain, vomiting, fever, or chills.

Dr. Shahida Baqar, an expert on food-borne illnesses, reminds us, "Most people who eat contaminated food will recover quickly with only mild symptoms." However, sometimes these germs can multiply and cause more serious illnesses.

Some people are at greater risk of getting very sick. Children under 5 years old, pregnant women, elders, and those with weakened immune systems should be extra cautious.

If you or a loved one doesn't feel better after a couple of days, or if symptoms like high fever (over 100°F), blood in stool, or frequent vomiting occur, it's important to see a doctor. Dehydration can be a serious concern with food poisoning, so make sure to drink plenty of water. Watch for signs of dehydration, such as feeling dizzy, dry mouth, or not passing much urine.

A special note about E. coli infections: One strain can cause kidney damage, especially in children. This infection cannot be treated with antibiotics, and researchers are working on new ways to help prevent these kidney problems.

Research funded by the NIH is exploring ways to prevent foodborne illnesses. Some scientists are studying how harmful bacteria and viruses enter the body, while others are working on developing vaccines to protect against food poisoning. But for now, the best way to stay safe is by practicing good hygiene and food safety.

Let's stay safe, take care of each other, and enjoy our food together!

Source: [National Institute of Health](#)