

Start at the Store: Prevent Foodborne Illness

Safeguarding your home against foodborne illness does not begin at home, but at the supermarket, grocery store, or any place where you buy food that will be stored and served. According to the Centers for Disease Control, each year, foodborne illnesses cause about 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,200 deaths nationwide. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends seven steps consumers can do while they shop for food in order to prevent these illnesses.

- **Check for cleanliness.** Buying from a retailer who follows proper food handling practices helps assure that the food is safe. Two questions to ask your self are: What is the general impression of this facility? Does it look and smell clean?
- **Keep certain foods separated.** Separate raw meat, poultry, and seafood from other foods in your shopping cart. Place these foods in plastic bags to prevent their juices from dripping on other foods. Also, separate these foods from others at checkout and in grocery bags.
- **Inspect cans and jars.** Don't buy foods in cans that are dented or bulging. Also, don't buy food in jars that are cracked or have loose or bulging lids.
- **Inspect frozen food packing.** Packages should not be open, torn, or crushed on the edges. Avoid buying packages that are above the frost line in the store's freezers. 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.
- **Select perishables, cold, and frozen foods last.** Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and dairy should be the last items placed in your shopping cart. Remember to place meat, poultry, and fish in separate plastic bags so they won't drip and contaminate other foods.
- **Choose fresh eggs carefully.** Before placing eggs in your cart, check to make sure that they are clean and not cracked. Buy only refrigerated eggs and follow the "Safe Handling" instructions.
- **Be mindful of time and temperature.** It is important to refrigerate perishable products as soon as possible after grocery shopping. Pay careful attention to the "2-hour rule" – because harmful bacteria can multiply in the "danger zone" (between 40 degrees and 140 degrees Fahrenheit), perishable foods should not be left at room temperature longer than 2 hours. Change that rule to 1 hour when temperatures are above 90 degrees Fahrenheit. If it will take more than an hour to get groceries home, use an ice pack to keep perishables cold.

FDA Consumer Update <http://www.fda.gov/consumer/updates/foodillness051308html>