



HEALTH NEWS FROM DR. YU

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Follow rules to eat well – and safely – at potlucks

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The days are getting longer, the sun is showing more, and the potlucks are coming. As the potluck/picnic season approaches, I wanted to remind you of food safety basics that allow you to share food with friends and family confidently. Food safety includes starting with clean hands and surfaces, separating raw meats from other foods, and keeping food at the right temperature.

Hands are your most important cooking tools, but they can also be the most dangerous. Germs from dirty hands are one of the most common ways for food to be contaminated.

- Always wash your hands before preparing or serving food.
- Twenty seconds of washing with warm water and soap, and drying with a clean towel is an excellent way to start cooking.
- Wash your hands often while cooking, especially after handling raw meats.

Always assume that raw meat has germs on it and keep it separate from other foods. Counters, cutting boards, and utensils must start clean, and be washed and sanitized after use with raw meats and before use with other raw foods. Use separate cutting boards for raw and cooked foods. Make sure to wash fruits and vegetables under running water before using them. Fresh and locally grown produce can make your meal taste wonderful, but leave the dirt they grew in out of your meal.

While cooking, it is important to keep ingredients at the right temperature so you do not give germs a chance to grow in your food. Keep raw meats in the refrigerator until ready to use. Do not thaw meats on the counter; thaw them the night before in the refrigerator. Use a thermometer and cook meats to 145°F (fish, whole cuts of beef, pork, or lamb), 155°F (hamburger or sausage), or 165°F (chicken or casseroles).

Once food is cooked, there are three options to keep it safe: serve and eat within two hours, keep it hot above 140°F until served and eaten, or cool it to below 41°F in the refrigerator. Use chafing dishes, crock-pots, and ice, or rotate foods out of the oven or fridge. The only way to be certain that food is within the safe temperature zones is to use a food thermometer. Food kept properly hot or cold can be used as leftovers. If the food sat on a table all afternoon, toss what is left. You may not be able to see or smell bacteria growing on the food, but vomiting or diarrhea are symptoms of foodborne illness that will be hard to ignore.

The recipe for a successful potluck includes two clean hands, separated raw meats, and washed produce. Prepare the items, and then keep the food either hot or cold as needed until you are done with it. Use utensils to serve the food and toss any leftovers that were not kept at the proper temperature. Enjoy the potluck and be confident that folks will be talking about your yummy potato salad and not about how they spent the weekend in the bathroom.

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