



# Healthier Me

Spring 2012

## In this issue:

Vitamin D and its benefits	1
Take-out food safety	2
Handling food safely on the road	3
How to avoid food-borne illnesses	4

## Healthier Me is a quarterly publication

In this issue you will find the great benefits of getting enough Vitamin D, how food-borne illness happens, safe handling of grab and go foods, and how to handle food safely while traveling.

## Vitamin D and its benefits

By: *The University of Michigan Cooperative Extension*

Imagine a nutrient that could help prevent the following diseases:

- Colon Cancer
- Breast Cancer
- Prostate Cancer
- Pancreatic Cancer
- Diabetes
- Crohn's Disease
- Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Osteoporosis
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Ulcerative Colitis
- Asthma
- Lupus

**Too good to be true?** That's the potential promise of Vitamin D, a nutrient that was once thought to be limited to the prevention of rickets in children and severe bone loss in adults.

Vitamin D is known as "the sunshine vitamin" because it is naturally produced in our bodies when our skin is exposed to sunlight. Spending 10 to 15 minutes outside daily or at least two times per week with face, arms, legs, or back exposed to sun (without sunscreen) is sufficient for our bodies to make Vitamin D. It is also found in certain foods such as cod liver oil, salmon, tuna, eggs and fortified milk, margarine, cereals, orange juice, and yogurt. Vitamin D also helps your body use calcium.



## How much vitamin D do we need in one day?

As we age it becomes harder for our skin to make vitamin D. Therefore, we need more vitamin D as we age. Currently, the daily recommendations for both men and women are as follows (the IU means international units):

- Pregnancy: 200 IU
- Birth to age 50: 200 IU
- Ages 50 to 70: 400
- Ages 71 + : 600 IU

Because of new research, the recommended amount could increase to 1,000 to 2,000 IU per day! Taking more than 2,000 IUs of Vitamin D is toxic. Consult with your doctor before you take a Vitamin D supplement.

## Can I get too much Vitamin D?

Yes, overdosing with Vitamin D can cause a reduction in appetite, vitamin poisoning, lethargy, and kidney damage. It is a fat soluble vitamin and cannot be quickly excreted through urine.



# Take-out food safety

By: *The University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension*

Mealtime is grab-and-go for many people. Take-out food is taking over. Wherever you obtain your take-out food, certain food safety tips apply:



## Tip 1: More than two is bad for you

Two hours is the maximum time perishable foods should be kept at room temperature. When not kept under control, bacteria can grow rapidly. If you're serving food in temperatures over 90° F, such as at a picnic, limit the time in which food sits out to one hour or less. Just one bacterium, doubling every 20 minutes, could grow to 64 bacteria in two hours and 2,097,152 bacteria in seven hours!

Don't hesitate – refrigerate at 40°F or colder if you won't be eating your take-out meal within two hours.

Perishable foods include meat, poultry, fish and dairy products, pasta, rice, and cooked vegetables. Also, refrigerate fresh, peeled, and/or cut fruits and vegetables within a couple of hours.



## Tip 2: Here's the rule – get it cool

Refrigerate hot take-out foods right away if you won't be eating them within two hours. Let the refrigerator cool them down. Leave the covers of containers cracked open to help food cool faster, but cover tightly once the food is cooled.

For large quantities, divide food into loosely covered shallow containers before refrigerating and then cover tightly when cool. Food cools more rapidly in shallow containers, limiting the growth of bacteria.

If you leave your pizza and other perishable foods at room temperature for more than a couple of hours, toss them out. Some types of bacteria can form a heat-resistant toxin that cooking can't destroy.



## Tip 3: Avoid delay – eat in a day

Plan to eat take-out foods and leftovers within a day for greater safety and quality.



## Tip 4: Don't miss a beat – safely reheat

Don't reheat take-out food in its original container in the microwave, unless the container is described as safe for microwave use. Chemicals from carryout containers can be absorbed into foods at high temperatures. Safe containers for microwave cooking include glass and glass ceramic cookware, and those labeled for microwave use.



## Tip 5: When in doubt – toss it out

You can't always see, smell, or taste bacteria that cause food-borne illnesses. It takes from half an hour to two or more weeks before you get sick from contaminated food. Sometimes it's hard to know if food has been handled safely. If you're not sure, throw the food away.



# Handling food safely on the road

*From the USDA, Food Safety and Inspection Service*

**Vacation!** Oh, how we long for that eight letter word every summer, when millions of us eagerly get away from school and work. We take to the road in cars or recreational vehicles, live on boats, relax in beach or mountain vacation homes, and camp.

No matter where we go or what we do, there is a common denominator that runs through all of our summer travels and relaxation – it's called food! There are some simple, common-sense food safety rules that can save a vacation from disaster. Following this advice could make the difference between a vacation to remember and one that is remembered because people got sick from improperly handled food.

## First, some general rules while traveling this summer:

**Plan ahead:** If you are traveling with perishable food, place it in a cooler with ice or freezer packs. When carrying drinks, consider packing them in a separate cooler so the food cooler is not opened frequently. Have plenty of ice or frozen gel-packs on hand before starting to pack food. If you take perishable foods along to eat on the road or to cook at your vacation spot, plan to keep everything on ice in your cooler.

**Pack safely:** Pack perishable foods directly from the refrigerator or freezer into the cooler. Meat and poultry may



be packed while it is still frozen, in that way it stays colder longer. Also, a full cooler will maintain its cold temperatures longer than one that is partially filled. Be sure to keep raw meat and poultry wrapped separately from cooked foods or foods meant to be eaten raw such as fruits.

If the cooler is only partially filled, pack the remaining space with more ice. For long trips to the shore or the mountains, take along two coolers – one for the day's immediate food needs, such as lunch, drinks, or snacks, and the other for perishable foods to be used later in the vacation. Limit the times the cooler is opened and open and close the lid quickly.

## When camping:

- Keep the cooler in a shady spot covered with a blanket, tarp, or poncho, preferably one that is light in color to reflect heat
- Bring bottled water or canned drinks
- Keep hands and utensils clean when preparing food

## When boating:

- Make sure to take the cooler along
- Don't let perishable food sit out while swimming or fishing. Remember, food sitting out for more than two hours is not safe
- If you catch fin fish, scale, gut, and clean the fish as soon as they are caught. Wrap both whole and cleaned fish in water-tight plastic and store on ice
- Crabs, lobsters, and other shellfish must be kept alive until cooked

## When at the beach:

- Take along only the amount of food that can be eaten to avoid having leftovers
- Bring the cooler! Partially bury it in the sand, cover with blankets, and shade with a beach umbrella
- If dining along the boardwalk, make sure the food stands frequented look clean, and that hot foods are served hot and cold foods cold

## When in the vacation home or the recreation vehicle:

- If a vacation home or a recreational vehicle has not been used for a while, check leftover canned food from the previous year. Discard canned foods which may have been exposed to freezing and thawing temperatures over the winter
- Check the refrigerator. If unplugged from last year, thoroughly clean it before using
- Make sure the refrigerator, food preparation areas, and utensils in the vacation home or in the recreational vehicle are thoroughly cleaned with hot soapy water

# How to avoid food-borne illnesses

From [www.foodsafety.gov](http://www.foodsafety.gov)

Food safety is a concern year-round. Relax and enjoy picnics and other summer festivities with family and friends, but be careful. When cooking indoors and outdoors, remember food safety is an important factor of food fun. Be sure to take the right precautions to avoid food poisoning and food-borne illnesses any time of the year.

The following symptoms should be checked out by a physician: nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, fever, cramps, double vision, trouble swallowing, and paralysis.

Most people get sick within four to 48 hours after eating bad food. If symptoms are severe, please contact a physician or go to the hospital immediately. Did you know:

- Around 30 million Americans will suffer from food borne illnesses this year?
- Nearly all cases can be linked to unsafe food handling practices?

**So, here's what you can do to protect your family from food-borne illnesses:**

## Safety at the supermarket:

- Check the "sell by" or "use by" date. If it's expired, don't buy it
- Don't buy cans with dents, bulges, or rust
- If frozen foods aren't solidly frozen, don't buy them
- Open cartons of fresh eggs. If any are cracked, don't buy them
- Never buy dairy products that are unpasteurized
- Bring refrigerated and frozen foods home immediately after shopping and store them promptly

## Store it right:

- Set refrigeration between 35°F and 40°F; freezers should be at or below 0°F
- Refrigerate meat, fish, and poultry on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator to prevent raw juices from coming into contact with other foods
- Follow the "use by," "keep refrigerated," and "safe handling" information on packages
- If a package smells or looks suspicious, throw it out even if the "use by" date has not expired

## Preparing safe food:

- Always thaw frozen meat, fish, or poultry in the refrigerator

- Always marinate food in the refrigerator, not on the kitchen counter, and discard leftover marinades
- Keep your cooking area clean
- Wash hands with soapy water for at least 20 seconds before and after handling any meat products
- Cover cuts or sores with bandages or wear plastic gloves
- Never chop vegetables or salad ingredients on a cutting board used to prepare raw meats, fish, or poultry unless the board was thoroughly cleaned between uses
- Thoroughly wash all utensils, containers, cutting boards, and work surfaces
- Use separate serving plates and utensils for raw and cooked foods

## Cooking to perfection:

- Use separate utensils for sampling and stirring
- Don't sample foods that contain raw meat, fish, poultry, or eggs unless they are fully cooked
- Don't roast meat or poultry at temperatures below 325°F. Cooking foods at low temperatures for long periods of time may encourage bacterial growth
- Don't baste foods with marinades used on raw meats during the last 10 minutes of cooking

## Serve it safe:

- Always use clean utensils and serving plates for cooked foods
- Don't leave any perishable food like meat at room temperature for more than two hours
- Pack lunches in insulated containers with a freezer pack
- Serve hot foods at a temperature above 140°F and cold foods below 40°F

## Handling leftovers:

- Refrigerate cooked food within two hours after cooking; divide large amounts of leftovers into small portions and place in shallow containers for quick cooling
- Reheat leftovers to 165°F or until steaming hot
- Label and date cooked foods. If you don't plan on eating them within a few days, freeze them



For more information on nutrition, visit the website [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov) or contact Ines Beltran with Gwinnett Cooperative Extension at 678.377.4010.