

4 Ways to Make Safer Food Selections

Your Guide to Safer Eating Out and Taking Out

Introduction

You're probably already taking precautions against foodborne illness at home, but you need to be careful when you are away from home too. Here are four easy steps you can take to protect yourself and your loved ones when you are selecting foods that are ready to eat at a restaurant, delicatessen, take-out counter, or grocery store.

1 Be aware of Raw or Undercooked Foods

Foods from animals such as meat, poultry, fish, shellfish, and eggs when eaten raw or undercooked sometimes contain harmful viruses and bacteria that can pose a risk of foodborne illness. Young children, pregnant women, older adults, and those with compromised immune systems are particularly vulnerable. You are at increased risk if you suffer from liver disease or alcoholism, if you have decreased stomach acidity (due to gastric surgery or the use of antacids), or if you have a compromised immune system due to: steroid use; conditions such as AIDS, cancer, or diabetes; or treatments such a chemotherapy.

Who's at Risk, Risky Foods, and Cause of Illness

Foodborne illness is preventable if you take the right precautions		
RISKY FOODS (This is a partial listing)	WHO IS AT RISK	CAUSE OF ILLNESS
Raw or Undercooked eggs: Caesar salad dressing; soft-cooked eggs; Monte Cristo sandwich; meringue pie; some puddings and custards; mousse; sauces made with raw eggs (e.g., Hollandaise)	Everyone, especially Older Adults Young Children Immune-Compromised	<i>Salmonella enteritidis</i>
Raw dairy products: Raw or unpasteurized milk; some soft cheeses like... Camembert, Brie	Everyone, especially Pregnant Women Older Adults Immune-compromised Young Children	<i>Listeria monocytogenes</i> <i>E. coli</i> O157:H7 <i>Campylobacter</i> <i>Salmonella</i>
Raw or rare meat: Hamburger, carpaccio	Everyone, especially Older Adults Young Children	<i>E. coli</i> O157:H7 <i>Salmonella</i>
Raw or undercooked molluscan shellfish: Raw clams or oysters on the half shell	Everyone, especially Persons with liver disease or alcoholism Immune-compromised	<i>Vibrio vulnificus</i> Other <i>vibrios</i> Hepatitis A
Raw fish: Sushi, ceviche, tuna carpaccio	Everyone, especially Immune-compromised Older Adults	Parasites <i>Vibrio parahaemolyticus</i>

To reduce your chances of foodborne illness you should stay away from:

- Raw fish or shellfish - oysters, clams, sushi, sashimi, ceviche
- Meat or seafood ordered undercooked and food with uncooked egg ingredients - such as "runny" fried or poached eggs; dressings or sauces such as hollandaise, homemade mayonnaise, and Caesar salad dressing; desserts like chocolate mousse, meringue pie and tiramisu.

2 Ask About Preparation Recipes vary. If you're not sure whether a ready-to-eat item contains undercooked ingredients, ask how the food is prepared.

3 Request that Food be Thoroughly Cooked If the item you are interested in selecting contains raw or undercooked meat, fish, shellfish, or eggs, ask if that ingredient can be eliminated. If the food is prepared to order, ask for it thoroughly cooked.

4 Make a Different Choice With certain foods, such as oysters on the half shell or an egg-based mousse, it may be impossible to accommodate your request for thorough cooking. In that case, simply choose something else. It is a minor inconvenience compared to the major problems caused by foodborne illness.

To learn more about foodborne illness and ways to prevent it, talk to your health care professional.

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