Keeping Food Safe

Quick! What's your favorite food? Did you eat it this week? Did it taste delicious? Did you get a belly ache afterwards? Even worse, did you have a reaction to it? If you did, you're not alone! According to a current health site, close to 48 million people in the United States come down with some type of food-borne illness each year! That's a lot of upset stomachs!

Even the cleanest and nicest restaurants can unknowingly pass along food-borne illnesses. Most of the time, you can't just look at food and know that it will make you sick after you eat it. Restaurants spend countless hours and follow very strict food handling rules to help avoid anything that might cause such distress; but, what about meals and food we consume at home?

Of course there's no 100% guarantee that everything we put into our mouths is safe, but we can follow some general rules to help keep our bellies happier!

Keep your refrigerator set at a temperature of at least 40 degrees, preferable colder! Keep your freezer at 0 degrees or colder. Always put your refrigerated goods into your own refrigerator within two hours of your shopping trip. If it's going to be longer than that, make use of a cooler bag or ice chest in your vehicle. Not only will quick refrigeration help your lettuce stay crispier, it may also help keep bad germs from growing more quickly in the warmer temperatures.

When it's time to cook foods that have been stored in the freezer, plan far enough ahead to thaw the food in the refrigerator, in the microwave, or in a lead-proof package or plastic bag in cold water. You'll need to change that water every 30 minutes or so to help it to keep defrosting. Make sure the package or bag doesn't allow leaking.

Use hot water and soap to wash any cutting boards, counters and utensils that touch raw meat.

Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and clean water before you prepare or eat any food. This is a very good rule to teach children at any age – no matter where you eat and no matter where you are!

When cooking food, use a thermometer. Different temperatures apply to different kinds of meats: Poultry should reach at least 165 degrees, steaks/roasts should reach at least 145 degrees, and ground beef, veal, lamb and port should be cooked to at least 160 degrees.

Once you're enjoyed your meal, put it away quickly – at least within 4 hours on a mild temperature day or indoors. It's best to freeze leftovers – from a safety standpoint. If you don't freeze them, you should toss them out if they've been in the refrigerator for more than 2 – 4 days. You should also discard foods and products that are past their expiration dates.

These are just a few food safety tips that can help you and your loved ones avoid a belly ache, and stay safe out there!