

Food Safety Even Important at the Grocery Store

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Bacteria are everywhere. While there are neutral and good types of bacteria, there are also some bad ones that we need to be concerned about. Bad bacteria cause infections and foodborne illness. Today, we will focus on how bad bacteria can cause foodborne illness. Bad bacteria may be found in the food you purchase from the grocery store or may be contaminated into your food by how you handle it. For most of us, a small amount of bacteria in our food will not cause us to get sick. However, there are certain groups of people who are more susceptible to foodborne illness. They include infants, young children, pregnant women, older adults, and those with weakened immune systems.

Certain foods support the rapid growth of harmful bacteria. They are called potentially hazardous foods. Generally, they tend to be high in protein, low in acid, and high in moisture. While some other foods are considered potentially hazardous, foods of animal origin are of the most concern, especially when shopping at the grocery store. These foods include meat, poultry, fish, eggs, milk, cheese, and yogurt. Tofu is also considered a potentially hazardous food.

Time and temperature are also important for keeping bacteria in foods under check. The Danger Zone is the temperature range that bacteria thrive and multiply. It ranges from 40 – 140 degrees Fahrenheit. At temperatures above 140 degrees, some bacteria begin to die. Others survive, but do not multiply. Bacteria survive and some multiply slowly at refrigerator temperatures below 40 degrees. At freezer temperatures below 0 degrees, bacteria do not multiply, but some survive. The longer a potentially hazardous food is in the Danger Zone, the more the bacteria in that food multiply. The more bacteria there are in a food, the greater your chance of getting sick from eating that food. For this reason, it is recommended that potentially hazardous foods stay in the Danger Zone for two hours or less. This includes the time that it is out of the refrigerator or freezer while you shop at the grocery store. If you are going to be shopping for more than a few items, pick up the items you want to buy in the following order to prevent potentially hazardous foods being out in the Danger Zone for too long:

1. Non-food items or non-perishable foods – canned or prepackaged foods not requiring refrigeration, fresh fruits and vegetables, and/or baked goods)
2. Refrigerated foods – dairy products, eggs, fresh meat, poultry, and/or fish
3. Frozen foods

After finishing your grocery shopping, drive home immediately and put away foods that require refrigerating or freezing. If it will take you longer than 30 minutes to get home from the store, use a cooler and ice to keep foods cold.

Another way to keep foods safe while at the grocery store is to prevent cross contamination. Cross contamination is transferring bacteria from one food or surface to another. It can happen easily and without realizing it. By simply touching a food with bacteria and then touching a different food or surface, you have moved bacteria from one place to another. For this reason, it is recommended that meat, poultry, fish, eggs, milk, cheese, yogurt, and tofu be kept separate

from other foods even when shopping. By separating these foods, you prevent cross contamination should meat packages tear, eggs crack, or containers break and potentially hazardous foods leak onto other food products.