

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

FAX: 932-5261

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BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.  
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776  
e-mail:makeith@mail.ifas.ufl.edu**Safe Summer Waves**

Just in time for summer heat, when no one wants to turn on an stove, here comes another round of internet tales about how unsafe microwaves are supposed to be. Microwaves are blamed, over and over again, for creating all kinds of supposedly dangerous chemicals in our foods. Or they're blamed for destroying all the nutrition in our foods. But where is the evidence for any of this?

Basically, there is no good, reliable, solid evidence. One recent round of tales has been based on some high school students' project. Yes, their broccoli lost a lot of its phytonutrients, but they used much more water than is normally used, and had to cook it for much longer time (to heat all that extra water).

The cancer 'research' came from two different men who wrote articles but never showed any evidence. They didn't use good comparisons of foods, had no medical training to evaluate health, and never gave any details about what they actually did. Both of them have disappeared, one changed his name because he thought people were persecuting him, so there's no way to know where they got their evidence.

What do today's doctors say? Many prefer that cancer patients they treat microwave their meat before they grill it! There is solid evidence that grilling does change meat protein in ways that can cause cancer, especially if the meat is over-done or charred at all. By microwaving the meat first and draining off the juice, the amount of these cancer-causing changes can be greatly reduced.

As for destroying nutrients, most vitamins are affected by heat, no matter what

the source. The fact that microwaves take much less time to heat the food means that the vitamins are hot for a shorter time, and therefore have less chance to break down. Unless you seriously over-cook your food, or use way too much water that takes a long time to heat, there will be more vitamins left in the food after a zip in the microwave than after being heated on the burner.

What about leaking microwaves? If your oven is a 25 year old antique there might be problems. If the front window in the door, the metal grid over the window, or the gasket around the door are damaged or have holes in them, then microwaves could leak. A damaged microwave oven should not be used. But even if it is, by a foot or two away from the oven, the waves will have lost all their power and faded out.

What is not safe in a microwave are plastic containers that were not meant for microwaves, or using them more often than they were meant to be used. A plastic tray or bowl under a frozen meal is completely safe for heating that one meal. A plastic dish that is sold for use in the microwave, or that says 'microwave safe', can safely be used multiple times. The standard for testing to be sure that no chemicals are coming out of the dish and into the food is 240 hours of microwave heating. But the yogurt cup, the margarine tub, even the cardboard or foam take-out plate, are not intended for microwaves, and there is no guarantee that they are safe. Plastic wrap should not be allowed to touch heating food because it has not been approved either.

Once a food has been warmed in a microwave it should be completely cooked or eaten immediately. Microwaves do not kill bacteria as well as stove-top cooking does, and warm food is a great place for bacteria to grow. If you thaw food in the microwave, cook it right away. If you partially cook meat in the microwave, put it on the grill immediately. Don't give bacteria a chance to grow on your safe food.

This week's recipe has a Cajun flavor that you can heat up with Tabasco sauce or chili powder, or tone down by using Italian seasoning instead. Just don't put the cheese on till the very end or it will get tough. Hot meal, cool kitchen, summer supper!

### Spicy Stuffed Peppers

4 large green bell peppers	1 - 15 oz can kidney beans, rinsed and drained
1 C cooked brown rice	1 - 14 oz can diced tomatoes with Italian spice
1 tsp Cajun spice mix	½ C grated nonfat mozzarella cheese

Cut tops off peppers, remove seeds and veins. Mix beans, rice, tomatoes and spice in bowl. Divide into the peppers. Set filled peppers in microwavable baking dish with cover. Add 1/4 inch of water in bottom of dish. Cover. (Do not allow plastic wrap to touch peppers if you use it.) Microwave on high for 10 minutes. Sprinkle cheese over peppers, return to oven for 4 - 5 more minutes until cheese melts and peppers are slightly tender. Serves 4.

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