Maybe It Saves Your Food

Have you seen the ads recently for the "miracle" food savers. They claim to keep food fresh and unspoiled for three or four times as long as regular plastic food storage containers. The “miracle” ingredient they claim is “silver nanoparticles” that have been “infused” into the plastic. If you’ve looked at the prices for them, you’ll see where some of the silver went. At $30 plus shipping and handling for 4 containers, these are not inexpensive. But do they work? As always, there’s a grain of truth.

First some basics: Yes, silver is a good toxin for killing bacteria and molds. Some really high end refrigerators have stainless steel shelves or trays that have silver melded into them. They’re mostly used in restaurants and food service. Silver has been added to paint and lacquers to be sprayed on equipment. Silver coatings can be used on countertops or on the vents over stoves. Silver can added to fabrics to keep socks from getting smelly or reduce bacterial growth in sports uniforms. It’s been added to plastic for keyboards, sports bottles and drink holders, pens and probably phones. There was at least a proposal to make silver-containing brushes to purify water. Swish them through dirty water and they’d kill any bacteria, so they said.

Now these plastic food storage containers are on the market. Besides the cost, why aren’t they being promoted by every food safety organization in the country? For one thing, no reliable food safety sources are sure how well they work. To do its job, the silver has to actually touch the bacteria. Just having real silverware in your spoon drawer does not automatically kill all the bacteria in the drawer!
Bacteria-laden smelly feet do actually touch the socks they are wearing. So silver in the socks will prevent bacteria from growing. But, if you put several pieces of fried chicken in a plastic container with silver mixed into the plastic, how much of the chicken is touching the container? Only parts of the skin touch, and that’s not a whole lot. So the silver will stop bacteria from growing on the bottom, and anyplace where the chicken touches the side of the container. But the rest of the chicken is still good food for bacteria.

But, maybe the silver does prevent bacteria or mold from growing all across that chicken, or on all the fresh strawberries in the bowl. If it does then the silver must be coming out of the plastic into the air and getting onto the food that way. Or maybe it’s dissolving into the spaghetti sauce you put in the container. Too much silver is toxic to humans too. So how much could get onto the food, or how long would we have to use those bowls, before we got a toxic dose? No one seems to know. Would it be more harmful to children or the elderly? No one seems to know.

Plus, if the silver is coming out of the plastic, how long would it take before there was not enough left in the bowl to protect the food? Would they last longer if you only stored chicken and broccoli, but not very long is you stored greasy cheese sauce? At some point you would be left with some very expensive plain old plastic bowls, with no special food protection left. The folks selling these containers aren’t saying, even if they do know the answers.

Do they work? They might, at least partly. Are there some risks? There might be. They might turn out to be great, safe and common in the future. Are they worth the price today? You’ll have to decide that for yourself!

In the meantime, here’s a wonderful fruit chutney that will keep for at least 2
weeks in the refrigerator. It has a bit of a bite to it from the ginger. It’s sweet and sour too, perfect to serve with grilled pork chops or chicken for dinner, or to add to a chicken sandwich for lunch. If you’re allergic to mangos, use 2 peaches instead. Enjoy!

Raisin and Tropical Fruit Chutney

1 mango, peeled, pitted and diced 2 cloves garlic, minced
1 small papaya, peeled, pitted and diced 1 Tbsp ginger root, minced
1 C red wine vinegar 1/4 C brown sugar
½ tsp ground cloves ½ tsp ground cumin
½ tsp black pepper 1/8 tsp salt
1 C raisins

Place all ingredients except raisins in saucepan. Heat and simmer over medium heat for 15 min, stirring occasionally. As it thickens, lower the heat. Add raisins and cook 5 more minutes. Allow to cool slightly, then transfer to glass jar with lid. Store tightly covered in refrigerator. Makes 1 quart.