

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Countdown to the big day, the relatives are arriving, the cookies are baked.

Please folks, keep the kitchen safe! From now into the middle of January is one of the highest seasons for homegrown food poisoning outbreaks. There is so much food in the house, there are so many cooks in the kitchen, there's not enough room in the refrigerator, it all adds up to more bacteria growing in our food. But you can stop them!

Start by keeping them too cold to grow. Cold means less under 40° F. Use a thermometer to be sure! Besides meats there are a lot of other foods that need to be kept cold. Cut fruits and fruit salads, egg dishes, including deviled eggs, egg custards and pies or desserts that contain custard fillings all must stay cold to be safe. Dips and appetizers containing meat or seafood must be cold too. If there's not enough room in the refrigerator, send the nephews for ice and pull out the big coolers.

If your dinner will be buffet style fill larger dishes or pans with crushed ice. Nest the serving dishes of food down into the ice so they stay cold. Just put out as much as will be eaten soon. Keep the rest in the refrigerator or on ice in coolers and bring it out on clean plates as needed. If they sit out for more than 2 hours at room temperature they're potentially dangerous. Pitch them!

Another way to keep bacteria out of your food is to keep it too hot for them. Hot means over 140° F. Use that thermometer again to be sure! If there aren't enough chafing dishes or hot plates in the house to keep all the meats, dressing and vegetables

hot, keep them in the oven and set them out in smaller dishes. They can be held or served from slow cookers or rice steamers too. Any food that sits at room temperature for more than 2 hours needs to be thrown away. Foods that must stay hot include baked potatoes, cooked rice, beans, gravy, hot egg dishes and all hot meats and cooked vegetables. Reheat cooled foods to at least 165° F before serving them.

To keep one food from contaminating another keep raw foods separate from cooked foods, and fruits and vegetables separate from meat and seafood. Take a look at how food is arranged in the refrigerator. Keep baked goods on the top shelf. They won't drip onto anything below. If there is a separate drawer or compartment for fruits and vegetables they should be in it. If not, keep them in the middle of the refrigerator. Meat and seafood should be in dishes or pans in the bottom. There they won't be dripping juice onto veggies or fruit.

If possible, use two separate cutting boards, one for meats and the other for produce. Use a different platter and fork for raw and cooked meats. If you have the luxury of a large kitchen, set one counter for produce and the other for meats. That way there's less chance of bacteria moving from one food to another.

Always wash cutting boards and all utensils when finished with one food, before they are used for the next food. Use hot soapy water to wash, then rinse well. Of course the most important things to wash are your own hands. Those ten fingers are the top ten carriers of food bacteria. Wash hands before and after handling any foods, handling pets, cigarettes, drinks, or anything that isn't food. Take off your rings and jewelry while you cook, bacteria love to hide under them.

Here's an interesting variation on the sweet potato casserole, or just a new way

to serve whipped sweet potatoes. Garnish with sweetened dried cranberries for some holiday color. Happy Holidays!

Crusted Baked Sweet Potatoes

5 medium sweet potatoes	1 Tbsp butter or margarine
2 Tbsp evaporated milk, warmed	1/4 tsp cinnamon
1/2 cup flaked coconut	1/2 cup quick rolled oats
1/4 cup finely chopped pecans	2 Tbsp butter or margarine, melted

Remove skin and chop potatoes into chunks. Boil until tender, then mash or put through ricer. Stir in 1 Tbsp butter or margarine, milk and cinnamon. Beat until whipped and very light. Transfer to greased baking dish. Combine coconut, oatmeal and nuts in small bowl. Stir in melted butter or margarine. Sprinkle over whipped sweet potatoes. Bake at 350° F for 20 minutes or until topping is lightly browned. Serves 4.

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