

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Memorial Day is behind us, we're definitely into picnic season. And if you haven't noticed yet, the weather is warm. That combination is perfect for food poisoning if you're not careful. Taking food out of the kitchen and away from either the hot stove or the cold refrigerator is just what bacteria want. Unless you're careful you might regret that lovely picnic in the park! But who wants to be stuck inside all the time, with beaches and parks and picnic tables all around us? So get your food safety gear in tow and head out.

First, make sure you have enough ice or other way to keep the food cold. Not just lukewarm, it has to be cold. There are a few nasty bacteria that can grow at 40°F, but most of them find that to be just too chilly to move. So keeping food on ice will keep them in check. You can buy bagged ice or make your own. You can fill and freeze water bottles if you want to drink the water later. Or partly fill and freeze milk cartons if you'll discard the melted water. For longer trips there are coolers that plug into the car's electrical system. With them you don't need to worry about leaking ice water.

Pack food into coolers in such a way that there is ice or a frozen cold pack touching the most sensitive foods to keep them extra cold. If you're just taking a few items either use a small cooler or fill the larger cooler with more ice or cold sodas. Empty space is hard to keep cold.

Raw meats, including ground beef, chicken or fish, and yes - hot dogs too - really need to be kept cold. These foods with lots of protein will keep bacteria very happy if

they're too warm. Wrap them separately, and tightly enough that no raw juices leak out. Put them in the bottom of the cooler. They'll be colder there, and if a leak should happen, juices won't drip up onto any other food.

If you can, plan to chop fresh fruit and vegetables at the picnic. Produce cut in advance will spoil more easily. Either way, cut fruit and veggies must be kept cold too. Don't leave half a watermelon or a bowl of fruit salad sitting on the table. That nice juicy sugar will also keep bacteria very happy.

Pack enough plates and utensils that you have some to use for raw meats and others to use when the goodies come off the grill. Raw juice on a plate or fork can recontaminate the freshly cooked burgers or drumsticks. Disposable paper plates and utensils make cleanup easy. Just be sure you have enough.

For safety's sake, pack a meat thermometer. If you don't want to take your good one, get a pack of disposables. They come preset for beef, chicken or fish. You can find them in many grocery stores, usually hanging in front of a shelf or freezer case. Each is a different color. The tip of the thermometer will change color when the meat is hot enough. Once used, just toss it in the trash can.

Be sure to carry soap and hand sanitizer along with paper towels for clean up. The sanitizer won't be very effective if it's used on dirty, greasy hands. Wash first, then use the sanitizer if you think you need it. A good scrubbing with soap and water is usually all you need.

Unless you're really careful, the best plan is to come home with no food. Leftovers that have been on the picnic table, or in a cooler that is opened repeatedly, have often gotten too warm to be safely carried home. So pack what you're sure you'll

eat and discard the leftovers. As always, better safe than sorry!

Here's a really tasty way to carry a finger-food salad. If you prefer to start with fresh cauliflower, use 1 pound of trimmed florets and blanch them for 3 minutes in boiling water. Dip in cold water to chill. You can adjust the seasonings for stronger or milder according to your family's taste buds. Happy picnics!

Marinated Cauliflower

16 oz frozen cauliflower florets	1/3 cup chopped fresh basil (1 Tbsp dry)
1 tsp oregano	1 clove garlic
1 cup white vinegar (wine vinegar is good)	1 tsp prepared Dijon mustard
3-4 Tbsp olive oil	2 Tbsp chopped parsley
2 Tbsp chopped green onions	salt, pepper to taste

Combine thawed cauliflower pieces with basil and oregano in large glass bowl or plastic container. Crush garlic. Put garlic, vinegar and mustard in small pan and bring to boil. Pour over cauliflower and stir to coat. Cover and refrigerate for 8 hours or overnight. Stir once or twice. Taste and adjust salt and pepper if desired. To serve, drain off juice, stir in parsley and green onions, and drizzle with oil. Serves 6-8.