

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Are you too hot to cook? Or too busy? Or just don't think your cooking skills are up to it? Whatever the reason, more and more of us are resorting to take-out for our meals. It's quick, it's easy, you found a place whose taste you like. What could be the problem?

You might want to think carefully about the food safety issues. Mishandled foods can make you sick. Smaller children, older persons, pregnant women, people taking certain medications all have lower resistance. They will get sick sooner, and probably be sicker than a healthy adult would after eating the same food.

When not only the food preparation but the handling and storage is out of your hands, how is the food being handled? Who is looking out for your safety? Especially in hot weather, it won't take long for food sitting on a counter to become risky. Even if you're not doing the cooking, remember the big rules of food safety - Keep It HOT, or Keep It COLD. It can't stay in-between. It has 2 HOURS to still be safe.

If you pick up a rotisserie chicken, make sure the carton is HOT. If you're getting cole slaw to go with it, the slaw must be COLD. Don't just grab the boxes that are available on the counter. If the containers are at room temperature, put them back down, not into your shopping cart.

Once you have the food in your possession, head straight for home. You have 2 hours to eat it, get it hot again or get it cold again. Don't stop to pick up a video or drop

off the dry cleaning. Go home!

If the food is being delivered, take a look at how it was packed. Hot foods should be carried in a hot box or insulated container. Cold foods should come in a cooler or on ice. Feel the cartons. If they're just room temperature, if there's no sign of temperature control, send them back. Why trade convenience for food poisoning?

If the food won't be eaten right away, put the hot things in a hot oven. Use a food thermometer to be sure. It must stay above 140° F. Slow cookers or warming trays are okay if they are preheated.

If it will be several hours before the food will be served, divide it into smaller containers and refrigerate it. The containers should be less than 3 inches deep. Spread the containers across the shelves, not stacked on top of each other. If you stack several hot containers, the center of the stack will stay too warm to be safe.

Stick cold things directly into the refrigerator. They must stay below 40° F to be safe. Check the temperature of your refrigerator to be sure it's below 40° F. If food will be served soon, you can set the containers in crushed ice, or into a cooler with enough ice or freezer packs to keep food safe.

Remember the 2 hour rule. If perishable food is at room temperature for more than 2 hours it's quite possibly unsafe. If it took an hour to get the food home, you have 1 hour left of the 2 safe hours. If the room temperature is over 90° because you're at the beach, then your safe time is only 1 hour because bacteria grow faster. Be safe!

Dry foods such as breads, cookies, cakes and fresh fruit and vegetables are not as risky. They will last longer and still be safe. But meats, poultry, dairy and eggs, fish and seafood and any mixed dishes are all perishable. Take care of them, take care of

your safety. If you're bringing home grilled chicken, here's an easy and colorful salad to serve as a side dish. Have it ready as soon as the chicken comes in the door.

Mushroom and Squashes Salad

1 - 8 oz package sliced mushrooms	1 small zucchini
1 small yellow squash	1 Tbsp diced sweet red pepper
1/4 cup sliced green onions (half a bunch)	1 bag ready to eat spinach leaves
2 Tbsp oil-free Italian salad dressing	2 Tbsp white wine vinegar
1 Tbsp grated Parmesan cheese	2 Tbsp orange juice
1/4 tsp pepper	

Rinse and slice zucchini and squash into thin rounds. Combine mushrooms, squash and zucchini, red pepper and onions in medium bowl. Combine salad dressing, vinegar, orange juice, cheese and pepper in small bowl. Whisk together to mix well. Pour over vegetables. Stir gently and refrigerate at least half an hour to allow flavors to blend. To serve, divide spinach leaves into 4 plates. Divide mushroom mixture over leaves, using a slotted spoon so salad is not too wet. Serves 4.

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