



Food Safety & Nutrition

Taking Food on the Road



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V-A-C-A-T-I-O-N! A time we all look forward to. No matter where we go or what we do, in cars or recreational vehicles; on boats or relaxing at the beach or at camp, there is a common denominator that runs through all of our summer travels and relaxation -- it's called F-O-O-D!

The “road” to food safety, however, can either be a bumpy one or smooth -- depending on what precautions are taken handling meals as we travel this summer. So, some general rules:

Plan Ahead...

If you are traveling with perishable food, place it in a cooler with ice or freezer packs. When carrying drinks, consider packing them in a separate cooler so the food cooler is not opened frequently. Have plenty of ice or frozen gel-packs on hand before starting to pack food. If you take perishable foods along (for example, meat, poultry, eggs, and salads) for eating on the road or to cook at your vacation spot, plan to keep everything on ice in your cooler.

Pack Safely...

Pack perishable foods directly from the refrigerator or freezer into the cooler. Meat and poultry may be packed while it is still frozen; in that way it stays colder longer. Also, a full cooler will maintain its cold temperatures longer than one that is partially filled. Be sure to keep raw meat and poultry wrapped separately from cooked foods, or foods meant to be eaten raw such as fruits.

If the cooler is only partially filled, pack the remaining space with more ice or with fruit and some non-perishable foods such as peanut butter and jelly and perhaps some hard-like Cheddar cheeses. For long trips, take along two coolers -- one for the day's immediate food needs, such as lunch, drinks or snacks, and the other for perishable foods to be used later in the vacation.

Keep the cooler in the air-conditioned passenger compartment of your car, rather than in a hot trunk. Limit the times the cooler is opened. Open and close the lid quickly.

Now, follow these food safety tips:

When Camping...

Remember to keep the cooler in a shady spot. Keep it covered with a blanket, tarp or poncho, preferably one that is light in color to reflect heat.

Bring along bottled water or other canned or bottled drinks. Always assume that streams and rivers are not safe for drinking. If camping in a remote area, bring along water purification tablets or equipment. These are available at camping supply stores.

Keep hands and all utensils clean when preparing food. Use disposable towelettes to clean hands. When planning meals, think about buying and using shelf-stable food to ensure food safety.

When Boating...

If boating on vacation, or out for the day, make sure the all-important cooler is along.

Don't let perishable food sit out while swimming or fishing. Remember, food sitting out for more than 2 hours is not safe. The time frame is reduced to just 1 hour if the outside temperature is above 90°F.

Now, about that "catch" of fish -- assuming the big one did not get away. For fin fish: scale, gut and clean the fish as soon as they are caught. Wrap both whole and cleaned fish in water-tight plastic and store on ice. Keep 3-4 inches of ice on the bottom of the cooler. Alternate layers of fish and ice. Cook the fish in 1-2 days, or freeze and use it within 6 months. After cooking, eat within 3-4 days. Make sure the raw fish stays separate from cooked foods.

Crabs, lobsters and other shellfish must be kept alive until cooked. Store in a bushel or laundry basket under wet burlap. Crabs and lobsters are best eaten the day they are caught. Live oysters can keep 7-10 days; mussels and clams, 4-5 days.

When at the Beach

Plan ahead. Take along only the amount of food that can be eaten to avoid having leftovers. If grilling, make sure local ordinances allow it.

Bring the cooler! Partially bury it in the sand, cover with blankets, and shade with a beach umbrella.

Bring along moist towelettes for cleaning hands.

If dining along the boardwalk, make sure the food stands frequented look clean, and that hot foods are served hot and cold foods cold. Don't eat anything that has been sitting out in the hot sun -- a real invitation for foodborne illness and a spoiled vacation.

When in the Vacation Home or the Recreation Vehicle...

If a vacation home or a recreational vehicle has not been used for a while, check leftover canned food from last year. WSU Extension recommends that canned foods which may have been exposed to freezing and thawing temperatures over the winter be discarded.

Also, check the refrigerator. If unplugged from last year, thoroughly clean it before using. Make sure all food preparation areas in the vacation home or in the recreational vehicle are thoroughly cleaned.

So if you plan a vacation at the beach, or a road trip or just a mini vacation to the local park remember to keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold, don't cross contaminate, and wash your hands.

For more information about food safety contact the WSU Extension office at 397-6060 ext. 0.
