These days, many people eat out or take home ready-made meals. Eating in a restaurant, cafeteria, or a fast-food place can be safe and fun. But you should take steps to be sure your food is safe. Follow these simple rules for food safety.

If you leave food out for more than two hours, throw it away. Germs that make food go bad can grow if you don’t keep food at the right temperature. Store food in the fridge or freezer or in the oven/stove.

- Keep hot foods in the oven/stove at 145° Fahrenheit/3° Celsius or higher.
- Keep cold foods at 40° Fahrenheit/4° Celsius or lower in the fridge or freezer.

What are the safety rules for hot food? When you buy hot cooked food, eat it within two hours or keep it heating in the oven at 165° Fahrenheit/74° Celsius or higher. That will keep germs from growing.

What are the safety rules for cold food?

- Cold food should also be eaten within two hours or put in the fridge or freezer for later.

How should I reheat a meal?

Follow these rules for meals you buy hot or cold.

- Heat food until it is hot and steaming (at least to 165°F/74°C)
- Bring gravy to a rolling boil.
- When reheating food in a microwave, cover the food and stir it for even cooking. Turn the dish by hand once or twice while cooking.

Cold spots let germs live and can make you sick.

What if I’m eating at a restaurant? See if a restaurant looks clean before you even sit down. If the restaurant does not look clean to you, you should eat somewhere else.

- Always order your food fully cooked, especially meat, poultry, fish
and eggs. That’s what kills germs. When your hot meal comes, make sure it’s very hot and thoroughly cooked before you eat it. If it’s not, send it back.

• Don’t eat eggs that are raw or not fully cooked. These can hide in Caesar salads, custards, and some sauces.
• Don’t eat raw oysters.

What about the doggie bag? Be careful with leftovers. Will you get home within two hours after your meal? If not, leave the leftovers behind. Your car can get very warm inside. Germs can grow fast. It is best to take your food home right away. That way, your leftovers can go safely into the fridge.

A good rule to follow is: *When in doubt, throw it out!* Source: FDA Office of Women’s Health

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**Water Conservation Activities**

1. Take a shower instead of a bath – could save up to 700 gallons of water per month, or 2,650 liters
2. Turn water off when brushing your teeth, shaving or washing your face – saves 90 gallons per month or 341 liters
3. Save water that is wasted while waiting for it to get hot. Collect the colder water in a container and use it to water plants, etc. – saves 100-300 gallons per month or 378-1,135 liters
4. Use a partially filled bathroom sink to rinse your razor instead of letting the water run while you shave – saves 90 gallons per month or 341 liters
5. Use dye tablets or food coloring once a year to check for toilet leaks. Remove the toilet tank cover and drip 10 drops of food coloring into tank, wait 15 minutes and check for color in the toilet bowl. If you see any color in your toilet bowl, then you have a leak and it should be repaired immediately. – Saves 200 gallons per month, or 257 liters
6. Use a pan filled with water to rinse vegetables/fruit instead of running water – saves 200 gallons per month or 257 liters
7. Letting your lawn grow longer in the dry weather will keep your lawn’s soil moister and require less water – saves 500 gallon per month or 1,892 liters
8. When watering laws, use low-angle or pulsating sprinklers that produce droplets of water.
9. Set sprinklers to water the lawn, not sidewalks and driveways.
10. Dispose of tissues, insects and other such waste in the trash rather than the toilet.
11. Store drinking water in the refrigerator rather than letting the tap run every time you want a cool glass of water.
12. If you have a well, listen to hear if the pump kicks on and off while the water is not in use. If it does, you have a leak.
13. Mulch plants to retain moisture in the soil.

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**Preventing Tooth Decay**

Tooth decay starts when a sticky film (plaque) forms on the teeth. The germs in this sticky film use sugar from food and drinks to make acid, which attacks the teeth and causes the enamel to soften and decay.

When infants and toddlers have tooth decay it is often referred to as baby bottle mouth. Sweetened liquids, milk, formula, and fruit juice often remain on the infant’s teeth for long periods. Frequent exposure to the acids that attack the teeth can cause tooth decay. Not everyone realizes that baby teeth can decay soon after they erupt. If decay is caught early, the tooth may be saved. Caregivers who notice decay can show families what they see.

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Prevention of Tooth Decay in Young Children

• If a child needs a bottle to fall asleep, fill it only with water. Never allow a child to fall asleep with a bottle containing milk, formula, fruit juice or sweetened liquids. A clean pacifier recommended by the child’s dentist or physician may offer the needed comfort for the infant. Never offer a pacifier dipped in any sweet liquid.
• Do not let children carry bottles or sippy-cups around during the day. If they need a drink between meals and snacks, give them water in a cup.
• Clean children’s teeth and gums after feeding.

Common Myths about Tooth Decay

Myth: Babies and small children do not have tooth decay.
Fact: Everybody, except newborn babies, has decay causing germs in their mouths. If the mouth is not kept clean, these germs attack teeth as soon as they come through the gums.

Myth: Early tooth decay cannot be seen on children’s teeth.
Fact: Early tooth decay can be seen. White, yellow or brown spots on teeth are signs of early decay, and can be seen during teeth cleaning. If any spots are seen, the child should see a dentist, so the decay can be treated.

Myth: Tooth decay in baby teeth does not hurt the child.
Fact: Tooth decay hurts and will make the child cry. The child may not be able to eat or speak clearly.

Myth: Only foods that list “sugar added” are bad for teeth.
Fact: Any food that sticks to the teeth helps increase the risk of tooth decay. Sugars are called many different names: sucrose, fructose, glucose, lactose, dextrose, and maltose. Read the labels on food containers and serve food low in sugar.

Myth: Children should eat or “graze” all day with snack food and milk or sweet drinks.
Fact: Children need to eat only at meal and snack time so that the teeth are not always covered by acid.

Source: Health and Safety Bulletin, February/March 2007

Safe Toys for Children

Millions of toys have been recalled in recent months. The reports of lead poisonings, finger amputations, death and disability hardly bring forth images of happy children at play. With all the recent recalls, knowing which toys are safe for children to play with might seem confusing. Though the alarming number of recalls has raised public awareness about the topic of toy safety, these issues are not new.

Most of the recently recalled toys were produced in foreign countries and contained lead. Though there are regulations that govern the safety of toys sold in the US, toys are randomly inspected when there is a concern. Toys manufactured in other counties may have different or less stringent standards than those in the US. It is more likely that toys made abroad could contain harmful levels of lead. Lead was found in paint in children’s toys and in children’s costume jewelry. Lead is a serious toxin that can interfere with brain development. It can cause lasting learning and behavior problems. In high enough doses it can cause death. Lead cannot be seen or smelled; it can only be detected in a lab. You cannot check for lead in donated toys, antique toys, or toys bought at flea markets and thrift shops. Any toy not known to be safe

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should be removed. You can go to the CPSC website www.cpsc.gov/ for recalls of new toys.

Providing safe and appropriate toys is fundamental to healthy child care. In addition to checking for recalls, parents can check to make sure all toys are sturdy and well constructed. Toys should be checked frequently and repaired or discarded if they are broken. The recent recalls remind parents to take a second look at the toys they offer to their children. When they know what to look for, they can ensure that the toys are safe and appropriate. Appropriate toys enhance children’s learning experiences and provide hours of fun!

**Toy Safety**

**Prevention of Injuries from Toy Hazards:**

**Choking** – Choking on balloon, small parts, small toys and balls remains a leading cause of toy-related deaths and injuries. Items that fit in a choking tube or an unused roll of toilet paper are too small for children under 3 years of age. Latex balloons cause more childhood deaths than any other toy and should be kept out of reach for children under 8 years of age.

**Strangulation** – Check length of cords or elastics on pull toys used by children under 3 years of age. Remove knobs or beads if length is longer than 12 inches. Check the cords or elastics on toys in your infant and toddler’s room. If they can tangle or form a loop, the length should be less than 14 inches.

**Hearing Loss** – Almost 15 percent of children ages 6 to 17 show signs of hearing loss. Decrease the sound from loud toys by removing batteries or covering the speakers with tape.

**Exposure to Toxic Chemicals** – Some toys expose children to dangerous chemicals. Choose wooden or cloth toys over toys made with PVC plastic.

**Swallowed Magnets** – Avoid magnetic toys for children less than 6 years of age. If a child swallows more than one magnet, seek immediate medical attention.


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**New Weigh Loss Program**

**Eat Smart, Move More, Weigh Less**

A new weight loss program is being sponsored by North Carolina Cooperative Extension and the Bladen County Health Department. The program - Eat Smart, Move More, Weigh Less - is a 15-week program to help participants learn to eat healthier, get more physical activity and lose weight. Cost of the program is $35.00.

To find out details, call Sandra at 862.4591.