Take Safety on Your Picnic

With the approach of summer, picnicking will be special part of many activities. If picnic foods are not handled safely, they can cause foodborne illness. To prevent illness, take safety on your picnic.

There are three reasons why picnic foods can be hazardous. First, food receives a lot of handling. Second, food is not cooled rapidly after cooking. And third, equipment to keep hot food hot and cold food cold is usually not used and food sits out for long periods of time.

Keep picnic food safe. You can do that by preparing food safely. Wash hands before handling food and use clean utensils and containers. Do not prepare foods more than one day before your picnic unless it is to be frozen. Cooking foods in advance allows for more opportunities for bacteria to grow. Cooked foods need to be rapidly cooled. Over 67% of reported cases of foodborne illness are due to improper cooling. Frozen foods can be used if thawed in the refrigerator.

Mayonnaise-based foods need to be kept cold. Mayonnaise alone is too acidic for bacteria to grow in it. However, when mayonnaise is mixed with other foods, bacteria can grow if this mixture is kept too warm.

Cut melons need to be kept cold. Many people do not realize that melons, such as watermelons and cantaloupe, can cause foodborne illness. Bacteria, such as Salmonella and Shigella (common causes of foodborne illness), are often present on the rind.

Therefore, wash melons thoroughly before cutting then promptly refrigerate cut pieces. Melons, unlike most other fruits, are not acidic and so can support the growth of harmful bacteria.

Pack for safety. Keep cold food cold. Keep cold food at 40 degrees F or colder to prevent bacterial growth. To do so, pack cold foods in a sturdy, insulated cooler with plenty of ice or frozen gel packs.

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Freeze your own blocks of ice in milk cartons or plastic containers for use in the cooler. Put cold foods in water-proof containers or wrap in plastic wrap or aluminum foil and completely immerse in the ice inside the cooler. If using frozen gel packs or containers of homemade ice, place them between packages of food. Never just set containers of food on top of ice.

The trunk of your car can reach temperatures of 150 degrees F so it is best to transport coolers in the passenger area of the car. When you arrive at the picnic site, put a blanket over the cooler and place it in the shade to maintain cold temperatures. Keep the cooler closed until ready to use the contents.

Keep hot food hot. Keep hot foods at 140 degrees F or hotter to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria. Take-out foods or foods cooked just before being transported to the picnic can be carried hot. Wrap hot food in towels, then newspaper, and place inside a box or heavy paper bag. Keep these foods warm on a lit grill or use within one hour.

If you cannot keep cold food cold and hot food hot, take foods that do not need refrigeration. Examples include peanut butter sandwiches, dried fruit, nuts, unpeeled fresh fruit like apples, oranges, bananas, jelly sandwiches, unopened cans of food, meat, fish or fruit, cookies, cakes and crackers.

Wash your hands. Pack moist towelettes if you think your picnic site might not have handwashing facilities available. Hands carry harmful bacteria and viruses that contaminate food and cause illness.

Pack plenty of utensils and dishware. Never use the utensils and dishware that have touched raw foods, such as meat, fish and poultry, to store fresh or cooked foods unless they have been washed between use.

Juices from some raw foods contain harmful bacteria that can contaminate other foods and cause foodborne illness. Because proper washing might be difficult at a picnic, pack extra plates and utensils to prevent cross-contamination. Better yet, consider using disposable plates.

Source: North Carolina State University Cooperative Extension, Dr. Angela M. Frasier, Food Safety Specialist

Pressure Canner Testing

Gardens will soon be overflowing with shiny, red tomatoes, bright green peppers and string beans. Farmers' markets and produce stands will be piled high with fresh produce, or you may decide to pick your own fruits and/or vegetables at local farms.

Whatever produce you choose, canning can be a safe and economical way to preserve food at home. Canning favorite and special products to be enjoyed by family is a fulfilling experience and a source of pride for many people.

In preparation for this canning season, we recommend you assemble and evaluate all canning equipment. We can help you prepare for canning by providing canning instructions, bulletins and other information to assist you in preserving your food safely whether you choose to can, freeze, dry or make jams, jellies or preserves. Call the Extension Center at 910-862-4591 if you have questions.

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As you assemble and evaluate your canning equipment, we also recommend you have your dial gauge checked. Our office will be offering pressure canner lids checking for dial gauge pressure canners at the following locations:

- May 24: 9:30 - 11:30 and 1:30 - 4:00 Bladen Cooperative Extension
- June 20: 2:00 - 4:00 p.m. Clarkton Public Library

Choking Prevention: The Key to Childhood Safety

The statistics are alarming. Airway obstruction is the leading cause of unintentional injury-related deaths of children under the age of 1 in the United States. According to the National SAFE KIDS Campaign, 88% of deaths and nearly 80% of hospital emergency room visits for airway obstruction injuries involved children 4 years old and under.

Any item that can block a child's airway is a choking hazard. And, as most parents can testify, infants and toddlers put anything and everything in their mouths. Choking occurs when food or small objects, such as toys with small parts, buttons, popcorn, or grapes, get caught in the throat or block the airway, preventing oxygen from traveling to the lungs and brain.

After more than 4 minutes without oxygen, brain damage and even death can occur. As the old saying goes - “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”. To avoid airway obstruction in children, prevention is clearly the best strategy.

Remembering the information and tips that can help prevent choking in children is difficult for busy parents and caregivers. Therefore the International Food Information Council (IFIC) Foundation recognized the need for easy-to-use information to help prevent airway obstruction in young children.

The IFIC Foundation, in partnership with the National SAFE KIDS Campaign, developed a poster for parents, educators, childcare providers, and health professionals. The poster, “Prevent Childhood Choking: It's Up to You", is printed in English on one side and Spanish on the other side to provide this most important information to a wide audience.

Although childhood choking occurs all too frequently and often with tragic results, these accidents can often be prevented. The choking prevention poster may help parents and caregivers readily remember these important tips.

To order the poster, write to Choking Prevention Poster; International Food Information Council Foundation, 1100 Connecticut Ave, NW, Suite 430, Washington, DC 20036. Requests for multiple copies must be accompanied by a check made out to the International Food Information Council Foundation (single copies are free; additional copies are $1.50 each).

The poster is also available on-line at: http://www.ific.org/publications/brochures/chokingpos.cfm

Source: Food Insight, November/December 2005
Being a Calm, Positive Parent

Often, as much as children are loved and wanted, it is easy to develop a negative attitude about them. Influenced by the media, friends, neighbors, and fatigue, parents sometimes come to view children as an overwhelming burden.

It is true that when a baby enters family life, there are many new duties and demands involved in keeping them contented and healthy. Naturally parents are anxious and worried about doing everything correctly. New moms especially often pick up the message that it is their duty to devote every minute to their children constantly entertaining them and catering to their every whim. For those parents who work outside the home, the burden seems even more overwhelming. Yet an attitude of devotion and self-sacrifice can work against children and parents and against a happy and peaceful household.

Choosing to be a parent who has a calm and positive attitude is not difficult. Do not view your child as an enemy. Sometimes parents knowingly take on their parenting role as if it involved a constant battle of wills.

Let your child know by your touch, voice, and words that you love and cherish them. But let them come to know that you, too are a person with your own needs. Holding on to who you are while being concerned for your child will prevent unnecessary demands on their part and irritation and frustration on yours. It also gives tots a sense of security and sets the stage for the firm and fair rules of discipline older children need.

Adopt an easy-going approach and do not worry about being a perfect parent. It is not necessary to follow every rule of childcare to the letter. What feels natural to you is usually what is best. When little ones are cared for in a calm an unhurried way and allowed to develop at their own pace, you can almost be guaranteed they will blossom and thrive.

Look forward to each day with joy. Few things establish bonding more firmly than getting into the spirit of whatever you are doing with your child. Act as if bath time or mealtime were the most important things in the world to you at this moment. Since daily routines have to be performed anyway, why not make them fun for both of you?

For most of people, being a parent involves on-the-job training and this can be scary. Yet, it helps a lot when your attitude towards your children and yourselves, is caring and nurturing.