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For Better Living
Your Family's Health is in Your Hands

September is National Food Safety Education Month, and the theme of this year's campaign is: Foodborne Pathogens: Your Family's Health is in Your Hands, focusing on the importance of cleanliness in preparing food safely. There are four steps of food safety to keep in mind: Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill.

Clean: Wash hands and food contact surfaces often. Cleanliness is a major factor in preventing foodborne illness. Bacteria introduced by humans, pets or foods can easily spread throughout the kitchen and get onto cutting boards, utensils, sponges and counter tops. To help promote cleanliness:

- * Wash your hands with hot, soapy water before handling food and after using the bathroom, changing diapers and handling pets.
- * Wash your cutting boards, dishes, utensils and counter tops with hot soapy water after preparing each food item and before you go on to the next food.
- * Consider using paper towels to clean up kitchen surfaces. If you use cloth towels, wash them often in the hot cycle of your washing machine.

Separate: Don't cross-contaminate. Cross-contamination occurs when harmful bacteria are transferred from one food or surface to other food products. This often happens when you clean or cut up raw meat, poultry or seafood, then use the same sink, cutting board or knife to prepare salad ingredients and other foods that will be served raw or without further cooking. To avoid cross-contamination:

- * Separate raw meat, poultry and seafood from other foods in your grocery shopping cart and in your refrigerator.
- * If possible, use different cutting boards for raw meat products and products that are served without further cooking.
- * Always wash hands, cutting boards, dishes and utensils with hot, soapy water after they come in contact with raw meat, poultry and seafood and before continuing cooking.
- * Never place cooked food on a plate that previously held raw meat, poultry or seafood.

Cook: Cook to proper temperatures. To ensure a safe product, meats, poultry, fish and eggs all need to be cooked to a temperature that ensures the destruction of harmful bacteria that may be present. This temperature varies with the product. For some products, visual clues can be used to determine doneness. Reliable visual clues for eggs are firm yolks and whites; for fish, flaking easily with a fork. However, for ground beef, the long-standing visual clue - no pinkness left - doesn't ensure that a safe temperature has been reached. Some ground beef will turn brown long before the recommended internal temperature of 160 degrees F has been reached and some will remain pink even at 160 degrees F. Because of this, food safety experts recommend using a clean thermometer to make sure meat and poultry products have reached safe internal temperatures. Be sure to clean and sanitize thermometers when changing from one job to another.

Chill: Refrigerate promptly. It is important to refrigerate foods quickly, because cold temperatures keep harmful bacteria from growing and multiplying. Use a refrigerator thermometer to make sure your refrigerator is between 35 and 40 degrees F and your freezer is at zero degrees F or below. If you have prepared extras or have leftovers, divide these into small, shallow containers and refrigerate quickly after preparation or service. Be careful not to overfill your refrigerator. It does a better job of keeping food cool and safe when air can circulate around the food.

Source: Colorado Cooperative Extension

Easy Waldorf and Raisin Salad

- 4 cups cubed apples
- 1 cup unsweetened pineapple tidbits
- 2 tablespoons chopped celery
- 2 tablespoons chopped pecans
- 2 tablespoons raisins
- 1 cup fat-free sour cream
- 1 tablespoon reduced-fat mayonnaise
- 1 ½ teaspoons sugar
- 1 ½ teaspoons orange juice

In a large bowl, combine the first five ingredients. In a small bowl, combine the sour cream, mayonnaise, sugar and orange juice. Pour over apple mixture. Toss to coat. Cover and refrigerate for 2 hours or until chilled. Toss just before serving. Yield: 6 servings