Patient Education Sheet

Prevention of Food and Water Borne Illnesses

What are food and water borne illnesses?

Food and water borne illnesses are infections caused by eating or drinking foods and water that are contaminated with germs such as bacteria or viruses. Normally, healthy people are able to fight off many of these infections. For people with weakened immune systems, there is a higher risk for developing these types of illnesses. This may include people with certain types of cancer and those who are receiving chemotherapy or radiation therapy treatments.

Cancer patients who are receiving standard doses of chemotherapy or radiation therapy treatments should follow the diet instructions given by their cancer care team. The ability to fight off infection will depend on many factors, including the type of cancer, the type and dose of treatment, and other risk factors that may be present. It is important to balance an adequate diet with limiting the risk for infection.

For stem cell transplant patients on high doses of chemotherapy or other drugs that suppress the immune system, there is a higher risk of becoming infected from germs in food and water. It would be important for these patients to avoid high-risk foods and drinks.

Are there safe handling tips that I can follow to reduce the risk of infection?

The following is a list of safe food handling instructions to reduce the risk of food borne illnesses:

- Wash hands with soap and running water before and after food preparation and before eating.
- Wash cutting boards, counter surfaces, and sinks with soap and water; and then wash with a 1 part bleach to 10 parts water solution.
- If possible, have different cutting boards for raw meats, cooked meats, and fruits & vegetables.
- Buy refrigerator foods that are still cold and frozen foods that are still solid. Shop for these last, bring them directly home, and put them in the refrigerator/freezer right away.
- Buy only fresh fruits and vegetables that do not have bruising and do not have broken skins. Wash thoroughly.
- Always check “sell by” and “use by” dates on food packages; and do not buy or use foods past these dates.
- Store raw meats and poultry in plastic drip-proof containers to prevent dripping on other foods.
- Cook poultry to 180º F and all other foods to 165º F, including leftovers. Meats should be cooked well-done with no pink centers.
- Cook eggs until firm.
- Bring leftover soups, sauces, and gravies to a rolling boil before serving.
- Refrigerate left-overs in small shallow containers within 2 hours of cooking
- Avoid foods from self-serve counters, delis, bulk containers, salad bars, and buffets.
- Throw out all prepared foods after 72 hours (3 days) in the refrigerator that have been opened, used, or leftover.

High Risk Foods/Beverages to Avoid

High Risk Foods/Beverages	Safer Substitutes
• Unpasteurized dairy products	• Pasteurized dairy products, instant hot cocoa mix, individually packaged creamers • *Even safer*: ultra-heat-treated milk, commercial sterile canned shake products
• Cheeses with molds, such as blue cheese, gorgonzola, brie, feta	• Pasteurized, processed American cheese • Lactose-free cheese
• Raw and undercooked eggs and foods containing eggs, such as omelettes, custards, French toast, egg nog, soft-boiled eggs	• Pasteurized eggs, hard-boiled eggs, thoroughly cooked eggs and foods containing eggs
• Unpasteurized or fresh squeezed fruit and vegetable juices	• Pasteurized juices
• Raw or undercooked meats, poultry, fish, shellfish, sushi	• All fully cooked meats, poultry, fish, shellfish
• Vegetable sprouts such as alfalfa and other seed sprouts	• All to be avoided
• All fresh, raw berries	• Cooked, frozen, or canned berries
• Smooth raw fruits that are unwashed, unpeeled, or uncooked	• Fruits washed under running water, peeled, or cooked
• Raw or unpasteurized honey	• Pasteurized honey
• Deli meats, processed meats, and hot dogs that have not been cooked until steaming hot	• Deli meats, processed meats, and hot dogs cooked until *steaming hot*.
• Ice from ice machines	• Fill clean ice cube trays with boiling water
• Raw or undercooked tofu	• Cooked, chopped tofu that has been boiled for 5 minutes or more in water or broth
• Raw, uncooked grain products	• Cooked grain products such as bread, ready-to-eat cold cereal, cooked cerial, cooked pasta and rice, pretzels, potato chips
• Raw or undercooked brewer's yeast • AVOID all contact with raw yeast	• Cooked breads, rolls, pizza crust and other dough that is fully cooked
• Outdated or moldy food products	• Foods that have not passed "use by" date and have no signs of mold
• Unpasteurized beer such as home-brewed and certain mirco-brewery	• Pasteurized beer such as bottled, canned, or draft beer
• Tap water, bottled spring water, well water, or cold-brewed drinks made with this water	• Filtered water or water boiled for 1 minute and place in clean bottle.
• Unroasted raw nuts and roasted nuts with shell on	• Roasted nuts such as those packaged in jars, cans, and plastic
• Avoid herbal supplements due to possible contamination	

Information in the above table is provided for general knowledge and examples; and it is not intended to replace advice provided to you by your physician.

Sources:

American Cancer Society @ www.cancer.org

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention @ www.cdc.gov

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