The Labors for Your Fruits

Properly preparing produce can prevent poisoning

February 1, 1998 By Lark Lands, PhD

Collingswood, New Jersey PWA Joe Raciti says: “You never forget your first food poisoning: The headache, the vomiting, the diarrhea, the just-kill-me now feeling of being so sick. Suddenly you realize that your food was a biological Benedict Arnold.”

And the problem is far more widespread than most realize. Every year in North America, 33 million people are made ill by food-borne infections, 9,000 of whom don’t survive. Since anyone who’s immune-compromised is far more susceptible to such illnesses, it’s likely that PWAs are disproportionately represented among them. In fact, in terms of the three most common causes of food poisoning, the experts estimate that PWAs are at least 20 times more susceptible to *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* and 200 to 300 times more likely to develop *Listeria* infections.

Although improperly prepared, cooked or stored animal foods are the most common cause of food poisoning, fruits and vegetables are another possible source of potentially lethal germs. In 1996, more than a thousand people became ill after eating Guatemalan raspberries that were contaminated with *Cyclospora*, a diarrhea-causing parasite. The *E. coli* bacteria, found in lettuce, alfalfa sprouts and apple juice, has also caused serious illness in many. And anything grown at ground level could be contaminated with *Cryptosporidium* (the cause of cryptosporidiosis).

Luckily, Robert Lehmann, food safety expert and author of *Cooking for Life: A Guide to Nutrition and Food Safety for the HIV-Positive Community* (Dell/New York City), says that it doesn’t have to be either difficult or expensive to chop the risk by sanitizing fruits and veggies properly. His tips:

Before food preparation, scrub your hands for 20 seconds with warm water and soap. That will greatly reduce the chances of transferring infectious organisms to your food.

Wash all produce with a mixture composed of one-half teaspoon of dishwashing soap in a gallon of water (this will remove most dirt and other contaminants); use a scrub brush to completely remove surface dirt, if necessary; always rinse well.

Then submerge the washed produce for 10 seconds in a mixture containing one tablespoon of bleach in one quart of water; then place in a colander long enough to drip dry. The chlorine bleach will destroy bacteria, protozoa and fungi and then evaporate harmlessly when the produce dries. Make this the final step since using tap water for another rinse could reintroduce disease-causing

organisms. Warning: Never mix chlorine bleach with the dishwashing liquid, or any other cleanser or chemical solution. The combination can produce dangerous chlorine gas, which can be fatal if enough is inhaled.

Use the bleach mixture to clean your plastic (not wood) cutting board. And never put produce on a cutting board that has been used for raw meat, fish or poultry.

Even produce you'll peel should be thoroughly washed and bleach-dipped first, since disease-causing critters could be transferred from a knife blade or your hands to the interior of the fruit or vegetable.And what do you do when you'll be eating away from home, where you can't control all this? Other than fruit you can peel, stick to cooked fruits and vegetables. Raciti says: "I now monitor everything that passes my lips, especially if I didn't prepare it, because I know: Every eating episode could be life-threatening."

Perhaps the best summary on preventing food poisoning was given long ago by HIV specialist Larry Waites, MD: Boil it, cook it, peel it or forget it!

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/The-Labors-for-Your-Fruits-1585-7603