



PARISH NURSE MINISTRY NOTES



As we begin the summer season, many people enjoy cooking outdoors on their grills. Grilling keeps the heat out of the kitchen and can be great fun, as long as you practice safe food handling and cooking. Food poisoning can ruin the loveliest garden party! A little attention to detail can keep food borne illnesses from creeping into your menu.

When those uninvited guests creep into your meal, they can wreak havoc. Symptoms of food poisoning include chills, fever, dizziness, headaches, vomiting, diarrhea and stomach cramps. Many people mistake the symptoms for stomach flu.

Food safety starts at the grocery store and continues until food is served. Every step of the way, there are important safeguards to stop harmful organisms from multiplying and causing illness. You can prevent most food-borne illnesses by following some simple guidelines:

1. Wash your hands often – before, during and after food preparation and handling.
2. Clean grills with hot, soapy water before firing them up.
3. Keep coolers, containers, knives, grill tongs, forks and cutting boards clean.
4. Use separate cutting boards and utensils for raw meats and for cooked meats, and still another set for produce.
5. Always use a meat thermometer to determine whether meat is done. Meat fork thermometers make it easy to check burgers and other flat foods.
6. Refrigerate food promptly after you buy it, and no more than two hours after you serve it. In very hot weather, don't keep food out longer than one hour.
7. Use one platter for raw meat and another for after it is cooked.

Any chef will tell you that overcooking your food on the grill can ruin a good piece of meat, poultry or fish. Cooking to the proper temperature not only kills the germs, it also brings out the flavor of the grilled food. But overcooking food makes it tough as well as increases the amount of potential carcinogens.

The trick is to grill it just long enough to make it safe to eat without turning it into a piece of leather. For most meat, there's only one way to do that – with a meat thermometer. Cook burgers to 160 degrees, poultry to 170 – 180 degrees, steaks and chops to 145 – 170 degrees, sausages or hot dogs to 165 degrees, and seafood until it flakes.

When moving your feast to a picnic spot, packing the cooler is a critical step. Start with cold food; don't use a cooler to actually chill your food. Your best bet is to prepare the food the night before so that it is properly cooled when you place it in your clean and sanitized cooler. Be sure not to put any raw meat or poultry on the bottom so their juices will not contaminate other foods.

A cooler packed with ice or ice packs and cold food will stay cold for hours. Transport the cooler in an air-conditioned car if possible and place it under a shade tree until grill time.

Keep the food cooler closed until you are ready to cook. Keep drinks in a separate cooler so the frequent opening and closing doesn't affect the food temperature. And don't forget to bring along moist towelettes or some hand sanitizer to keep hands clean.

Follow these simple steps, and you can keep food poisoning from ruining your barbecue or picnic. Do your part for safety, and then relax and enjoy!

