

## **Food Safety for Outdoor Fun**

“Engage in regular physical activity”... this is one of the key recommendations from the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Having an active lifestyle can mean outings as a family for hiking, camping, and other recreational activities which often involve food. As we approach the warm summer months, be sure to handle food safely.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that there are 76 million cases of foodborne illness resulting in 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths each year says Lorrie Coop, local Texas Agrilife Extension Service County Agent. Common symptoms of foodborne illness include diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, fever, and abdominal cramps.

The first step to food safety for outdoor activities is to plan ahead. Take some time to decide what you are going to eat and how you are going to cook it. These steps can help you determine what types of equipment you will need. You should also consider what you will have access to during your stay outdoors adds Coop. Will you have water that is safe for drinking? Can you build a fire, use a grill, or use some type of portable stove to prepare foods?

Depending on your planned activities and access to equipment, you might consider packing foods that do not require refrigeration such as peanut butter, crackers, juice boxes, canned meats, dried noodles and soups, beef jerky, dried fruits, nuts, or other dehydrated foods.

However, if do plan to take along perishable foods, follow these suggestions to keep foods safe:

- Place perishable foods in a cooler with plenty of ice. You may even consider placing a refrigerator thermometer in a plastic bag in the cooler. Make sure the cooler temperature remains at 40 degrees or less.
- Try packing meat and poultry while it is still frozen to maintain the temperature. Also, full coolers will stay colder longer than one that is partially full.
- When packing raw meats, keep these items separate from other ready to eat foods such as fruits and vegetables in the cooler.
- Consider taking along two coolers – one for perishable foods which should only be opened when foods need to be prepared and another for drinks which will be opened more frequently.

In hot summer weather, it's also important to remember that foods should not sit out for long periods of time. Generally speaking, you should discard any food left out more than two hours. However, if temperatures are greater than 90 degrees, food should not sit out any longer than one hour.

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Finally, the most important food safety tip for outdoor fun is to wash your hands. “Handwashing is crucial to the prevention of foodborne illness” states Coop. It’s best to wash your hands with warm, soapy water for 20 seconds. If running water is not available, use a disposable towelette to wipe hands clean. You may also consider a hand sanitizing solution which can reduce germs but will not eliminate any dirt or grime present.

For more information about food safety, contact your local Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service office at 940-459-2651, or visit the following link:

United States Department of Agriculture – Food Safety and Inspection Service  
[http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact\\_Sheets/Food\\_Safety\\_While\\_Hiking\\_Camping\\_&\\_Boating/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/Food_Safety_While_Hiking_Camping_&_Boating/index.asp)