

**Family Living  
Focus**

by  
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**National Food Safety  
Education Month:**

Store It. Don't Ignore It.

September celebrates the National Food Safety Education Month with a new theme focusing on proper food storage. We'll relate the theme "Store It. Don't Ignore It" to the millions of Americans who carry "bag" lunches off to school or work every day.

All our food must be handled and cooked safely. Perishable foods should be kept cold while commuting by bus, bicycle, on foot, or in a car. When you arrive at school or work, keep foods cold until lunchtime to prevent harmful bacteria from multiplying. Pack just the amount of perishable food that can be eaten at lunch. That way, there won't be a problem about the storage or safety of leftovers.

Handling and preparing food properly is equally important—whether cooking from scratch, serving take-out meals and restaurant leftovers, or packed lunches calls for everyone to be vigilant.

Penn State Cooperative Extension research resources show bacteria grow rapidly in the "danger zone" — the temperatures be-

tween 41 and 140 F. The refrigerator temperature should be 40 degrees Fahrenheit and the freezer should be zero F. Check both "fridge" and freezer periodically with a refrigerator/freezer thermometer.

Packages for the freezer should be tightly sealed to prevent loss of moisture. Wrap irregular shapes in flexible material removing any air trapped between food surfaces and package material. Packages should be moisture and vapor proof, odorless, tasteless, and resistant to tears and breakage.

It's fine to prepare the food the night before and store the packed lunch in the refrigerator. Freezing sandwiches helps them stay cold. However, for best quality, don't freeze sandwiches containing mayonnaise, lettuce, or tomatoes. Add these later. Insulated, soft-sided lunch boxes or bags are best for keeping food cold. An ice source should be packed with perishable food in any type of lunch bag or box. On the other hand use an insulated container to keep food like soup, chili, and stew hot. Fill the container with boiling water, let stand for a few minutes, empty, and then put in the piping hot food. Keep the insulated con-

tainer closed until lunchtime to keep the food hot 140 F or above.

Prepare cooked food, such as turkey, ham, chicken, and vegetable or pasta salads, ahead of time to allow for thorough chilling in the refrigerator. Divide large amounts of food into shallow containers for fast chilling and easier use. Keep cooked food refrigerated until time to leave home. When using the microwave oven to reheat lunches, cover food to hold in moisture and promote safe, even heating. Reheat leftovers to at least 165 F. Food should be steaming hot. Cook frozen convenience meals according to package instructions.

It's important not to crowd the refrigerator or freezer so tightly that air can't circulate. Check the leftovers in covered dishes and storage bags daily for spoilage. Anything that looks or smells suspicious should be thrown out.

A sure sign of spoilage is the presence of mold, which can grow even under refrigeration. Mold makes food unappetizing and should be discarded. But you might be able to save molding hard cheeses, salami, and firm fruits and vegetables if you cut out not only the mold, but a large area around it to remove the mold growth below the surface.

Check your pantry to determine the condition of canned goods through the year. A sticky surface might indicate a leak. Newly purchased cans that appear to be leaking should be returned to the store, which should notify the FDA.

For further information about food safety and Cooking for Crowds, a food safety program for volunteers, contact Penn State Cooperative Extension in your county.

**Brown Bagging Can  
Save Calories, Cash**

Packing lunch can be a great idea, both financially and nutrition-wise. Of course, some savings will be offset by higher grocery bills, but if your family can save just \$5 a day on lunches, you can put another \$100 in the bank each month.

When planning lunches, it's important to consider the tastes of your family members—don't make sandwiches on wheat bread when your first-grader insists on white. Keeping that in mind, here are a few ideas for satisfying lunches:

- Choose whole-grain bread for sandwiches. It offers more fiber and trace vitamins and minerals than "regular" white or wheat bread. Look for the term "whole grain" or "whole wheat" on the ingredients label. You can also add interest and variety in sandwiches by using sandwich buns or bagels every once in a while. You can even use croissants occasionally, but they are high in fat and calories.

- Be careful in choosing "juice" boxes. Buy those with 100 percent juice rather than ones with large amounts of refined sugar.

- Include at least one fruit and one vegetable. Fresh fruits such as apples, bananas, oranges, peaches, nectarines and grapes are always good choices, but be sure to rinse and wipe them off before packing the lunch. Other possibilities include pop-top cans

of pineapple, peaches, fruit cocktail or other canned fruits; snack-sized raisins or other dried fruits; or snack-sized applesauce. Handy vegetables include carrots, celery sticks, cherry or grape tomatoes, sliced cucumber, and bell pepper strips.

- Consider including a carton of yogurt, as long as you can keep your lunch cool. Yogurt is a good way to include calcium in the meal when milk isn't an option. Low-fat string cheese is a good source of calcium, too.

- When no refrigeration is available, use an insulated lunch carrier with a frozen gel pack and pre-chill beverages and other items to keep contents cool. Or, you can freeze lunch-meat sandwiches (without lettuce, tomato or mayonnaise) and juice boxes overnight—they should be thawed by lunchtime. Or, pack items that don't need to be kept cool: peanut butter and jelly sandwiches; canned meat or fish; fresh fruit and vegetables.

- Steer away from ready-made lunch packs that are high in sodium and calories and low in nutrition.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.

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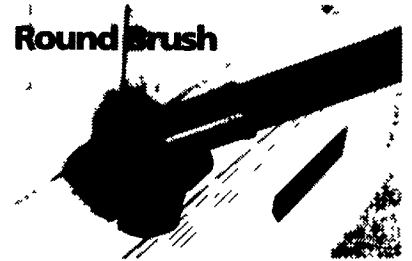
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