

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

No. 216

FOOD SAFETY - HOW DOES YOUR FRIDGE STACK UP?

We all know that foods need to be stored properly, both to retain their nutrient value and to keep them safe. Bacteria multiply on most food if given the chance - particularly if the temperature is between 5°C and 60°C (the "Danger Zone"). But did you know that even inside the cool of your refrigerator lurk unnecessary food-poisoning risks? Here is some advice on stacking for a healthier fridge.

CROSS CONTAMINATION

Most cooked, or ready-to-eat foods, which are found to be contaminated with food poisoning bacteria, occur as a direct result of "cross contamination". This term refers to the transference of bacteria from a raw food to a cooked or ready-to-eat product. Ready-to-eat products are foods that are ready for immediate consumption and require no further cooking or processing steps. They include sliced meats, cheeses, chocolate, prepared salads and fruit.

The purpose of correctly stacking your fridge is to minimise any chance of cross contamination.

As a general rule, store all foods as directed on the label, and follow these simple rules:

- store raw meats near the bottom of the fridge to ensure that juices do not drip onto other foods
- if this is not possible, place meat into a covered tray or other liquid-tight container on a fridge shelf (especially when defrosting meats)
- keep raw food covered and separated from cooked food
- cover cooked foods that are not likely to be reheated before serving, such as left over roasts, cakes, prepared salads, and store them on a shelf above uncooked foods
- use small, shallow containers for left overs, these allow for rapid cooling before placing into the fridge
- arrange food in your fridge so that cold air can easily circulate around it. Don't overstock the fridge. Refrigerators work better and are cheaper to run if they are defrosted regularly
- foods with strong odours, such as seafood's and some cheeses, should be wrapped. Avoid storing them for long periods near things like milk and cream, which are easily tainted
- never place milk in the fridge door. With the constant opening and closing of a busy fridge door, the temperature of the fridge creeps up, and we wonder why our milk doesn't last until the expiry date! Place milk in a part of the fridge less exposed to temperature fluctuations, perhaps towards the back of the top shelf.

For more information contact your local Environmental Health Office.

Contact details can be found at

http://www.health.nt.gov.au/Environmental_Health/Contact_us/index.aspx