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Keeping Food Safe: Shopping and Transporting Foods[1]

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Grocery shopping can be an entertaining activity, but effective shopping involves lots of planning and organization, depending on individual needs and choices in different grocery stores. Good planning and organization can save money and time. Have you ever wondered if you follow safe food handling practices when you buy and transport food? Follow these key guidelines to protect yourself and your family!

Shopping

- Ideally, start with the nonperishable sections, and proceed to the refrigerated and frozen sections last.
- Check canned foods to ensure they are not dented, rusty, or bulging.

- Choose undamaged fruits and vegetables. (For more information, see FCS8737: Fresh Produce: Safe Handling Practices for Consumers).
- Fresh cut produce must be refrigerated (For more information, see FCS8740: Fresh Cut Produce: Safe Handling Practices for Consumers).
- Buy only refrigerated, clean, uncracked eggs.
- Buy only pasteurized milk, milk products, and juices.
- Check for expiration dates before buying. Here are the meanings of the various terms that appear on labels:
- "Sell by" date: This is the date by which the store should sell the product.
- "Best If Used By" or "Best if Used Before" date: This is not a safety guideline, but manufacturers recommend consuming the food by this date for best flavor and quality.
- "Use By" date: The last date recommended by the manufacturer for peak quality.
- Purchase cold foods that have been in the refrigerator and frozen foods that are well frozen.
- Put heavy items at the bottom of the shopping cart and soft food on the top to prevent damage.

Prevent cross contamination

- Put raw meats, poultry, and seafood in plastic bags so that juices will not drip on and contaminate other foods, such as fruits and vegetables.
- Avoid packages that are torn or leaking.

- Separate meat, poultry, and seafood from other items in the grocery cart, at the check-out counter, and in grocery bags.
- Make sure the bagger doesn't mix raw meat with ready-to-eat foods in your grocery bags.

Transporting

- **Perishable foods must be refrigerated or frozen as soon as possible.**
- After grocery shopping, go directly home. Never leave perishable foods in a hot car!
- If you need to make a stop or if your trip from the grocery store to home is long, bring a cooler with ice or gel packs to keep cold food cold. This is also important if you shop at multiple grocery stores.
- Be sure to prevent the possibility of cross-contamination during transportation.
- Wrap hot food in doubled paper bags to maintain its temperature.

Perishable foods like meat, poultry, and seafood must be refrigerated within two hours of purchase. This is the "**2-hour rule.**" If the outside temperature is 90ºF or more, these foods must be refrigerated within one hour.

References

United States Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service, Safe Food Handling. Kitchen Companion. Accessed January 12, 2011.