

EXTENSION CONNECTION – How to Handle Food Safely

By: Paulelda Gilbert, ISU Extension Nutrition & Health Specialist

Q. Should I wash my meat and poultry before cooking?

A. One of the New Dietary Guidelines reminds us to play it safe with food and lists advice for how to prepare, handle, and store food safely. Many people are puzzled by the recommendation that “meat and poultry should not be washed or rinsed.”

Q. Doesn't washing food make it safer to eat?

A. Not necessarily. In the case of meat and poultry, the risk of cross-contamination from handling the food as it's washed outweighs any benefits. According to the US Department of Agriculture's FoodSafety.gov Web site, “Bacteria in raw meat and poultry juices can spread to other foods, utensils and surfaces.”

Your own hands, where they grasped the meat while washing it, could become just as bacteria-lade as the surface of the food. So could any surfaces where you set the meat or poultry as you prepare to wash it. The best bet is to leave meat or poultry untouched until you start cooking it, then immediately dispose of its supermarket packaging, which can also cause cross- contamination.

Q. What about bacteria on the surface of the food?

A. It's destroyed by cooking to a temperature of 160 degrees Fahrenheit for red meat and 170 degrees Fahrenheit for poultry, according to the USDA. *Information taken from Tufts University Health & Nutrition Letter.*

Call me at the Webster County Extension Office, 576-2119 or e-mail pgilbert@iastate.edu, with your nutrition and health questions. You may also call our toll-free ISU Answerline at 1-800-262-3804