



Brown Bag Safety

By Ora Emmerich

UCCE El Dorado County Master Food Preservers

The New Year brings with it the desire for change and improvement in many hearts. In a lot of cases, the change improves the heart. Many people choose to commit to a regular exercise routine or promise to eat more fruits and vegetables. Saving money by sticking to a budget seems to be a favorite New Year's resolution, and preparing a healthy lunch and bringing it to work helps many stay on course to succeed in sticking to the good intentions.

Although packing a lunch ensures a healthy choice of foods, the good may be undone if safe food handling practices are not followed. Spoiled food may look and taste fine and still be a haven for food borne pathogens that lead to illness and perhaps death. Of course, if food looks or smells bad, toss it out....do not take chances with your health.

Preparing a healthy lunch starts with the proper food choices. Most bacteria thrive at temperatures between 40°F and 140°F. Keep food for lunches at the right temperature by always refrigerating cold foods promptly. Choose foods that have been handled properly from purchase to home, and then keep those foods safe by investing in containers and carriers designed for transporting food. Aside from the ever popular peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, today's commuter enjoys a range of foods that can be carried to work. Last night's leftovers may be kept cool in an insulated lunch bag with the aid of a frozen gel packet. Just remember to keep those leftovers refrigerated and to use the food within four days. Most workplaces have refrigerators to store lunches and microwave ovens to heat up food. Whole fruits and vegetables, crackers, bread, canned meats and pickles do not need to be kept cold.

Many different sandwiches and wraps can be made with healthy ingredients. Bread getting soggy? Try keeping the different components of the sandwich separate and combine these just before eating. There are many sizes and types of containers available; some are even made of BPA-free plastic which can be tossed or reused, according to the situation. Use disposable wrapping material, such as cling wrap or foil to keep air and moisture from degrading food or try reusable containers made from plastic, glass or metal. These can be invaluable to the budget-conscious brown bagger.

For questions about safe home food preservation, or to schedule a speaker for organizations or clubs on the topics of food safety or food preservation, call the Master Food Preservers at (530) 621-5506. For more information, be sure to go to the Master Food Preserver website at http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Food_Preservers/. Sign up to receive our Master Food Preservers E-Newsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpnews/>.