

## **Beware the En Route Smorgasbord**

### Survey by the American Dietetic Association Finds Many Travelers Risk Food Poisoning

**CHICAGO (May 20, 2003)** — Compared with a year ago, a third more Americans will be "carrying on" meals and snacks from home this summer when traveling via plane, train or automobile.\* Yet most families take detours around simple home food safety precautions that can keep travel treats from spoiling even the best-laid family vacation plans.

A new survey from the American Dietetic Association shows that of the more than 60 percent of people who say they plan to take one or more vacations this season\*\*:

- 52 percent are traveling by plane. Nearly 40 percent plan to bring food with their carry-on bags, and more than 60 percent plan to bring food if the airline does not provide it.
- 90 percent are traveling by car, and 97 percent of them will bring food.
- 22 percent of those traveling by bus and 19 percent of train travelers plan to pack food to eat en route.

More than ever, families are toting food from home when they set out for vacation. This could be a reflection of the continual tightening of family pocketbooks; the availability of new convenient car-friendly foods; or even airlines' elimination of in-flight meals.

Our kitchens and dining rooms have extended beyond the confines of our home. So we need to remember to apply the same home food safety 'road rules' when preparing meals eaten away from home. Following some easy steps can help you save the adventure for vacation, not your back-seat picnic.

#### **Trends in Travel Treats**

According to the survey, travelers who pack food to eat on the way to their destination typically bring sandwiches (67 percent), chips and dips (66 percent), fresh fruit or vegetables (65 percent) and prepackaged lunches with meat and cheese (28 percent), all of which can spoil if not kept at proper temperatures.

The survey also reveals 30 percent leave the food they bring unrefrigerated for three to four hours, and 15 percent leave it out for more than four hours. This can create a food safety hazard for travelers and their companions. Perishable foods should never be left out and unrefrigerated for more than two hours, the point at which harmful bacteria begin to multiply rapidly. In hot weather (above 90°F), reduce the time to one hour.

#### **Preparing Foods 'To Go' the Distance**

Make sure your family doesn't squeeze a case of food poisoning into those already-stuffed suitcases by following a few easy pre-travel food preparation tips from ADA:

- Wash hands with soap and water before preparing foods and after switching tasks, such as handling raw meat and then cutting vegetables. Sing the chorus of your favorite vacation-themed song while you wash for 20 seconds. Also, make sure food preparation surfaces are clean.

- Keep raw meats and ready-to-eat foods separate. This includes placing raw meat, poultry and seafood on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator so juices don't drip onto other foods.
- Be sure to pack moist towelettes to clean up before digging in.
- In hot weather, transport perishable food in a cooler (packed with ice or ice packs) in the back seat of an air-conditioned car instead of the trunk. Remember to drop in a refrigerator thermometer to ensure the temperature remains below 40°F.
- If traveling by plane or train where space is tight, freeze a juice box or yogurt for a chilly treat that will also help keep other foods cool. Pack foods in a small, soft-cover travel cooler that will conveniently slip under the seat. Or, give each family member his or her own insulated lunch bag full of favorites.
- If stopping roadside for a mid-trip cook-out, remember to grill foods to proper and safe temperatures: hamburgers (at least 160°F), hot dogs (reheat to 160°F), and chicken (170°F). Pack raw meats for the trip in a cooler, placing them in a well-sealed container or wrapping tightly in saran. Be sure to keep them separate from other packed foods as raw juices from the meat can easily contaminate ready-to-eat foods.
- Don't forget that carry-out and fast food are also susceptible to food poisoning if not properly handled. If not eaten or refrigerated within two hours, toss it.

With approximately 65,000 members, the American Dietetic Association is the nation's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals. ADA serves the public by promoting optimal nutrition, health and well-being. To locate a registered dietitian in your area, visit the American Dietetic Association at [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org).

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*\*Impulse Research Corporation conducted the home food safety survey in April 2003 for the American Dietetic Association through an online survey of a random sample of 1,036 adults ages 18 and above who plan to take at least one trip this spring or summer. The sample was chosen to closely match U.S. population demographics.*

*\*\*Percentages do not add up to 100 percent as many travelers plan to take more than one vacation this summer via different modes of transportation.*

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