

Survey Reveals Restaurant Patrons are Hungry for Help At Home

American Dietetic Association Serves Up Tips for Safe Take-Out and Leftovers

CHICAGO (May 24, 2002) -- Americans want more than just a great meal from restaurants. Today, the American Dietetic Association released findings from a national consumer survey* that revealed, among other things, 75 percent of diners would find it helpful if restaurants provided proper reheating and storage instructions for leftovers or take-out food.

Consumers are craving convenience and are looking to restaurant options - in record numbers - to alleviate one facet of their busy lives. Each year, in fact, Americans are eating 54 billion meals at one of 858,000 restaurants and cafeterias across the country.** Further, the ADA survey finds nearly seven in 10 (69%) are eating at restaurants at least once a week and more than (57%) are ordering take-out.

We have become a culture of 'diners-out' and 'takers-out'. But without a basic understanding of proper food handling and storage for these foods, consumers may be ordering up a case of food poisoning for dessert. Each carry-out meal or doggy bag poses a potential food safety hazard if it is not promptly eaten and/or handled correctly.

Leftover Lovers

A dining experience doesn't necessarily end when a family leaves a restaurant - especially when leftovers are involved. According to the survey, more than 90 percent (91%) of Americans take leftovers home at least occasionally and 32 percent take home leftovers on a regular basis. However, when it comes to proper leftover storage and reheating temperatures, or determining if food is still edible, consumers are playing a guessing game.

The Guessing Game

Improperly refrigerating foods or relying on smell to judge whether foods have spoiled is a recipe for disaster. Yet, few consumers (19%) use a refrigerator thermometer to tell proper refrigeration temperature of foods and even fewer (6%) label and date restaurant leftovers to help them know when to throw foods out. Keep in mind, food may spoil long before it looks, smells or tastes bad. Unfortunately, 48 percent of respondents admit to relying on their senses.

Food poisoning sickens thousands of us each year. With more of us bringing home leftovers and take-out foods on a regular basis, we cannot afford to carelessly leave them out on the counter - or under our desks - for hours at a time. Families need to remember to refrigerate them promptly and avoid early food spoilage by using a refrigerator thermometer.

Tasty Temps

Most restaurant leftovers aren't quite the same the second time around. Blame half (51%) of American food preparers who have no idea what temperature is recommended for reheating leftovers. And, another 26 percent who unnecessarily overcook leftovers - some to temperatures as high as 200 degrees Fahrenheit - likely affecting taste and even texture. Using a meat thermometer is the only reliable way

to ensure that leftovers have reached a safe temperature and taste their best. Surprisingly, 85 percent never use one. For a safe and tasty meal the second time around, consumers should always reheat leftovers to 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

Take-Out Training 101

Most experts say food poisoning is often caused by mishandled food. Often, the symptoms of food poisoning can take weeks to appear. In an effort to help consumers dine safely and guard against foodborne illnesses, ADA offer the following reminders when it comes to handling restaurant leftovers and take-out foods:

- Refrigerate restaurant leftovers within 2 hours of eating the meal; in hot weather (90; F or above) this time is reduced to one hour
- Label and date restaurant leftovers and eat them within 3-4 days
- Always use a refrigerator thermometer to make sure the refrigerator is set below 40 degrees Fahrenheit
- Reheat restaurant leftovers to 165 degrees Fahrenheit
- Use a meat thermometer to ensure doneness and help maintain good taste

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.

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**Impulse Research Corporation conducted the home food safety survey in April 2002 for the American Dietetic Association through an online survey of 1,048 men and women ages 18 and older with a margin of error of + 3%*

***www.restaurant.org, National Restaurant Association 2002*

Contact: Jennifer Starkey Julia Dombrowski
American Dietetic Association American Dietetic Association
800/877-1600, ext. 4802 800/877-1600, ext. 4769