

When It Comes To Food Safety at Tailgates, Americans Aren't Scoring Points

American Dietetic Association Provides Tips for a Winning Season

CHICAGO (October 15, 2002) - This season, thousands of sports fans will gather an average of five times throughout the fall and winter to tackle a favorite American past time - tailgating. A recent American Dietetic Association survey shows that most tailgaters risk spoiling the fun by inviting a particularly challenging opponent to the game - food poisoning.

Just as professional football players prepare for the big game with special equipment and safety precautions, tailgaters nationwide need proper food-handling techniques and tools to score high points at pre-game parties.

Pre-Game Show

According to the ADA survey, nearly 60 percent of Americans prepare their tailgating treats at home. That means before pulling out of the driveway, fans should make sure food is packed in a well-insulated cooler with ice or ice packs to maintain a safe storage temperature of below 40°F. When taking a road trip lasting more than two hours - as 16 percent of tailgaters do - transport the cooler in the back seat of an air-conditioned car instead of the trunk. This holds true for car rides in hot weather when temperatures are above 90° F. Note that in cool-weather climates, this rule is reversed: transport coolers in the trunk (rather than in a heated car) where foods will benefit from the frequently chilly temperatures outside.

Where's the Safety?

When tailgating, 70 percent of those surveyed said they never use a refrigerator thermometer inside the cooler to ensure foods are stored at a safe temperature. Yet, 60 percent of tailgaters bring popular perishable items such as potato salad, cole slaw and pasta salad - egg and mayonnaise-based favorites that can easily spoil without proper refrigeration.

More than half (54 percent) will pack crowd-pleasers like burgers, bratwurst and chicken that require testing with a meat thermometer to ensure doneness. But, with nearly 60 percent (57 percent) never using a meat thermometer, most tailgaters run the risk of eating unsafe meat at their gathering. Don't let your meal be intercepted by food poisoning - cook burgers and brats to a minimum of 160° F and chicken to 170° F.

Overtime Play

Not all tailgating takes place before kick-off. In fact, 60 percent of tailgaters say they recycle pre-game goodies to serve and eat again during their post-game celebrations.

Eating foods that have been left unrefrigerated for more than two hours or in a cooler not kept at below 40° F is a major fumble, remember, when in doubt, throw it out.

Extra Points

Whether a rookie to the "sport" or among the 80 percent of tailgaters who hit the parking lot up to five times a season, follow these simple tips from the ADA to guarantee a win while tailgating:

- Wash hands before, during and after preparing food for a tailgate. Sing your favorite team's fight song while lathering with soap and water for 20 seconds.
- Be sure to pack moist towelettes to clean up before digging in.
- Always defrost meats in the refrigerator or in the microwave at home - never after arriving at the tailgating. Then, tightly seal raw or thawed meat in plastic wrap to prevent juices from contaminating other food items. Consider packing meat products in one cooler and additional foods in another.
- Keep raw meats and ready-to-eat foods separate. Pack extra or color-coded plates or utensils to help prevent cross-contamination while grilling and preparing side dishes. Use one set for raw foods and another for cooked foods.
- Always use a meat thermometer.
- Keep a refrigerator thermometer inside the cooler at all times to monitor the temperature.
- Don't forget that carry-out and/or pre-prepared foods are also susceptible to food poisoning.
- Throw away perishable tailgate items before entering the game. Foods should not be left outside for more than two hours. In hot weather (90° F or above) this time is reduced to one hour.

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 August 2002 for the American Dietetic Association through an online survey of 1,040 men and women age 20 and older with a margin of error of + 3%*

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