

Fresh Produce: Safe Handling Practices for Consumers¹

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A healthy diet should include a variety of fruits and vegetables. However, care must be taken to prevent foodborne illnesses that have been traced to some raw fresh produce. Here are steps that you can take to reduce your risk of foodborne illness from fresh produce.



Where You Shop:

- Buy produce that is **not** bruised or damaged.
- **Separate** fresh produce from raw meat, poultry and fish. This action will avoid cross contamination.
- Purchase only fresh-cut produce that is refrigerated or surrounded by ice.

At Home:

- Refrigerate fresh produce promptly. (Whole bananas, potatoes and tomatoes do **not** need refrigeration.)



- **All** fresh produce should be refrigerated within two hours of peeling, cutting, or cooking.
- Leftover cut produce should be discarded after two hours at room temperature.

During Preparation:

- Wash hands with hot soapy water before and after:
 - handling fresh produce
 - handling raw meat, poultry, or seafood
 - using the bathroom
 - changing diapers
 - handling pets
- Wash fresh fruits and vegetables with cool tap water just before preparing or eating. **Don't use soap or detergents.**
- Peel fruits and vegetables whenever possible to reduce microbial load and chemical residues.

FACT: Microbial load is the number of microorganisms (such as bacteria) on a specific food or on a certain area.

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- Scrub firm produce, such as melons, potatoes, carrots, and cucumbers, with a clean produce brush. Rinse with cool tap water.



- Cut away bruised or damaged areas before preparing or eating.
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and counter tops often. Use hot soapy water and rinse well. **Sanitize** them after contact with fresh produce, or raw meat, poultry, or seafood (see box).
- Sanitize kitchen sink, counter tops and other food contact surfaces often to prevent a build up of microbes.
- Don't cross contaminate! Use clean cutting boards and utensils for fresh produce.
- If you can, use separate cutting boards for raw meat, poultry, and seafood.
- Do not consume ice that has come in contact with fresh produce or other raw products.
- Use a cooler with ice or ice gel packs when you take perishable foods outdoors. This includes cut fresh fruits and vegetables.

To sanitize cutting boards, dishes, and utensils:
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Mix one teaspoon chlorine bleach in one quart water.
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Pour the mixture onto all surfaces or submerge appropriate items into the above solution and let sit at least one minute.

Rinse surfaces well with hot running water.

Counter tops can be sanitized by using the above solution mix, sanitizing sprays or wipes as an additional safety measure.



For More Information:

Visit the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) website at: <http://www.fda.gov> or call FDA Consumer Inquiries at 1-888-SAFEFOOD (a toll-free number).