Listeria, Food Poisoning

Every year, millions of people get foodborne illnesses (food poisoning). Each strain of *bacteria* (germ) is different. Special tests can recognize *pathogens* (disease causing germs) in animals, humans, and food samples in less than 8 hours. Culturing *techniques* (growing germs in a lab dish), may take up to 2 weeks.

ILLNESS CAN BE PREVENTED BY:

- Controlling the initial number of bacteria present
- Preventing the small number from growing
- Destroying the bacteria by proper cooking
- Avoiding re-contamination.

Poor personal hygiene, poor cleaning of storage and food preparation areas, and unclean cookware cause contamination of raw and cooked foods. Always clean well all surfaces that have been in contact with raw meat, poultry and eggs. Mishandling of raw and cooked foods allows bacteria to grow. The temperature range in which most bacteria grow is between 40° F (5° C) and 140° F (60° C). Raw and cooked foods should not be kept in this danger zone any longer than absolutely necessary. Under cooking or improper processing of home-canned foods can cause very serious food poisoning. Since food-poisoning bacteria are often present on many foods, knowing the characteristics of such bacteria is very helpful to prevent and control these possibilities.

LISTERIA

- Before the 1980's most problems associated with disease caused by Listeria were related to cattle or sheep because it is found all over, and can survive long periods of time under harsh conditions, and can grow at refrigerator temperature, Listeria is now recognized as an important foodborne pathogen (disease causing"bug").
- People with poor illness fighting abilities (*immunocompromised humans*), such as pregnant women or the elderly, are highly at risk to get sick from the strong and dangerous *Listeria*. In humans, taking in the bacteria is usually through contaminated food or water. The illness is marked by a flu-like illness. The symptoms (problems) may be so mild that they go unnoticed. A carrier state can develop. This means you carry the germs but are not sick. Death is rare in healthy adults.
- *Listeria* is a special problem since it can survive adverse conditions.
- Refrigeration temperatures do not stop growth of *Listeria*. It is capable of doubling in numbers every 1.5 days at 39.5° F (4.2° C). High heat, greater than 170° F (77° C), will disable the Listeria organisms. Since *Listeria* will grow slowly at refrigeration temperatures, using food regularly is important. This does not give enough time for the germ to grow.

PREVENTION

The first step in preventing food poisoning is to assume that all foods may cause foodborne illness. Follow these steps to prevent food poisoning:

- Wash hands, food preparation surfaces and utensils thoroughly before and after handling raw foods to prevent re-contamination of cooked foods.
- Keep refrigerated foods below 40° F (4.4° C).
- Serve hot foods immediately or keep them heated above 170° F (77° C).
- Divide large volumes of food into small portions for rapid cooling in the refrigerator. Hot, bulky foods in the refrigerator can raise the temperature of foods already cooled.
- Remember the danger zone is between 40° F (4.4° C) and 170° F (77° C). Above 40º F and lower than 170º F is bad.
- Follow good home-canning procedures.
- Heat canned foods thoroughly before tasting.
- **When in doubt, throw it out.**
- Infants, older persons, women who are pregnant, and anyone with an immune system which is not working

properly are especially susceptible to foodborne illness. These people should never consume raw fish, raw seafood, or raw meat type products.

- You are the key to preventing foodborne illness. **By observing the simple rules of good handling, food poisoning can be eliminated.**

SYMPTOMS

The toxin produced by Listeria causes cramps and diarrhea within 12 to 24 hours.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS FOR NAUSEA AND VOMITING

- **For infants:** Use a suitable alternative for fluid restoration as recommended by your caregiver. After correction of *dehydration* (loss of body fluids), other clear liquids that are appealing to the child may be added.
- **For infants and children:** Record fluid intake and urine output. Dry diapers for longer than usual may indicate dehydration. Diet may be added to as tolerated.
- **For children and adults:** drink small amounts of fluids often, so that you are drinking at least 2 quarts a day for an adult or as your caregiver suggests for a child. Take sips frequently, not overloading your stomach with too much fluid at one time as this may worsen the *nausea* (feeling sick to your stomach).
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver. **Do not give aspirin to children** because of the association with Reye's Syndrome.
- Until your diarrhea is under control you should drink clear liquids only. These are anything you can see through such as water, broth, apple juice, 7-Up® or other soft drinks. (Carbonated soft drinks should be allowed to go "flat" before drinking).
- Once you are tolerating clear liquids and keeping them down, you may move on to full liquids, soups, juices, and ice cream or sherbet. If they are well tolerated, begin to add bland foods to your diet.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS FOR DIARRHEA

Avoid:

- Milk
- Fruits
- Tobacco
- Alcohol
- Extremely hot or cold fluids
- Too much intake of anything at one time

When your diarrhea stops you may add the following foods that help the stool to become more formed:

- Rice
- Bananas
- Dry toast
- Apples without the skin

Once these foods are tolerated you may add low-fat yogurt and low-fat cottage cheese. They will help to restore the normal bacterial balance in your bowel.

Wash your hands well after using the bathroom and always, to avoid spreading bacteria or viruses.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You are unable to keep fluids down.
- Vomiting or diarrhea develop and or become persistent.
- Abdominal pain develops or increases or localizes. (Right sided pain can be appendicitis and left sided pain in adults can be diverticulitis.)
- You develop a high fever, which is an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C), or as your caregiver suggests, for over 3 days.
- Diarrhea becomes excessive or contains blood or mucous.
- You experience excessive weakness, dizziness, fainting or extreme thirst.
- You experience significant weight loss. Checking weight 2 to 3 times per day in babies and children will help verify adequate fluid replacement. Your caregiver will tell you what loss should concern you or suggest another visit to your personal physician.

- Record your weight today. Compare this to your home scale and record all weights and time and date weighed. Try to check weight at the same times every day.

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