



HOW TO AVOID ILLNESS FROM HAMBURGERS

The Issue

If you eat undercooked ground beef, it may result in a type of food poisoning that is commonly called hamburger disease. You can minimize your risks by handling and cooking raw ground beef properly.

Background

Hamburger disease is caused by a specific type of bacteria called E. coli 0157:H7. E. coli live in the intestines of cattle, and can be transferred to the outer surface of meat when an animal is butchered. The process of grinding can then spread the bacteria throughout the meat. You can not tell the difference between contaminated or non-contaminated ground beef by the way it looks, smells, or tastes.

Contact with E.coli 0157:H7

Two of the most common ways to come into contact with E. coli 0157:H7 are by directly handling raw ground beef without taking precautions, and by eating ground beef that is undercooked. People who get hamburger disease often report that they ate ground beef before they became ill.

You can also be exposed to this type of E. coli through other sources, including fermented (culture added) meats, unpasteurized milk, unpasteurized apple cider, unchlorinated water, and contaminated vegetables. In addition, you can spread

the bacteria just by touching an infected surface, such as a cutting board in your kitchen, and then touching another surface.

Symptoms of Hamburger Disease

People who become infected with E. coli 0157:H7 experience a wide range of health effects. Some do not get sick at all. Others feel as though they have a bad case of the flu, with symptoms ranging from severe stomach cramps, to vomiting, fever, and watery or bloody diarrhea. These symptoms usually appear within two to ten days after contact with the bacteria, and clear up within seven to ten days.

Some people who get hamburger disease experience life-threatening symptoms, including kidney failure, seizures, and stroke. While most of these people will recover completely, others may suffer permanent health effects, such as kidney damage, and some may die.

Minimizing Your Risks

By following some common sense guidelines in the way you handle and cook food, you can Fight BAC!®, and drastically reduce your risk of contracting hamburger disease and other foodborne illnesses.



Chill

- Bacteria grow quickly at room temperature, so when you are running errands, make grocery shopping your last stop
- Buy perishable foods last, and refrigerate or freeze them as soon as you get home
- Never defrost food at room temperature; thaw food in the refrigerator, in cold water, or in the microwave if you are going to be cooking it immediately
- Marinate food in the refrigerator
- Set your refrigerator to 4°C (40°F) and your freezer to -18°C (0°F)

Clean

- Always wash your hands for at least 20 seconds before handling food, and after handling raw meat, poultry, seafood or eggs
- Sanitize countertops, cutting boards and utensils with a mild bleach and water solution before and after preparing food
- Use paper towels to wipe kitchen surfaces, or change dishcloths daily to avoid the risk of cross-contamination and the spread of bacteria
- Avoid using sponges, as they are harder to keep bacteria-free

Separate

- Separate raw meat, poultry, and seafood from other foods in your grocery cart
- Store these raw foods in sealed containers or plastic bags on bottom shelves in your refrigerator to keep their juices from dripping onto other foods
- Use one cutting board for produce, and a separate one for raw meat, poultry and seafood

Cook

- To make sure you kill bacteria, cook hamburger and other ground meats thoroughly, as ground beef can turn brown before disease-causing bacteria are killed. Use a digital instant read food thermometer to ensure thorough cooking to an internal temperature of 71°C (160°F)
- Never place cooked food back on the same plate or cutting board that previously held raw food – people often make this mistake when cooking on the barbeque
- Never use left-over marinade for basting or as a sauce, unless you boil it first to kill bacteria

Health Canada's Role

Health Canada sets policies and standards governing the safety and nutritional quality of all food sold in Canada. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA)

enforces the policies and standards, ensuring that any food-borne illness is detected early, and that all necessary warnings go out to the public quickly.

As a founding member of the Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education, Health Canada also participates in public awareness campaigns about safe food practices. One example is a program called Fight BAC!®, which encourages Canadian consumers to think of food safety at every step of the food handling process, from shopping for groceries, to re-heating leftovers.

Need More Info?

For a video demonstration on how to handle hamburger safely go to:
http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/food-aliment/mh-dm/mhe-dme/groundbeef_boeufhache/e_ground_beef_safety.html

For more Fight BAC!® tips, visit:
<http://www.canfightbac.org/english/indexe.shtml>

For more information about Health Canada's Food Program, visit:
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/food-aliment>

You can also learn more about foodborne illnesses by visiting the Canadian Food Inspection Agency web site, at:
<http://www.inspection.gc.ca>

Additional It's Your Health articles can be found at:
www.healthcanada.ca/iyh
You can also call (613) 957-2991

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