



## The safety of fresh fruits and vegetables

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A diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables is important to maintaining good health. However, fresh produce can sometimes be a source of foodborne illness. *E. coli* O157:H7 has been found in unpasteurised juices, listeria in cabbage. If you respect some basic good hygiene rules, you can enjoy a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Since fresh fruits and vegetables are not cooked, anything that is left on them after they come into contact with other things will be consumed. This includes micro-organisms in organic manure and in the water used for irrigation and initial rinsing, microbes on the hands of the people who pick the produce, the containers and vehicles used to store and transport it, and droppings from birds that fly over the field.

The following measures can be taken to reduce the risks from microbiological contamination:

- When shopping, select fruits and vegetables that look fresh and are in good condition; avoid items with an off-odour, or that are obviously damaged or mouldy. Do not buy packaged vegetables that have liquid in the bag, though some condensation in packs of prepared salad is normal.
- Handle produce carefully: even hardy looking items can bruise. Buy only what you need. Some fruits and vegetables, such as apples and carrots, can be stored, but most items should be used within a few days.
- Put products into a clean, cold (5°) refrigerator promptly. Bananas, tomatoes, or fruits that need further ripening can be kept at room temperature.
- Read and follow label instructions for packaged fruit and vegetables, such as "keep refrigerated" or "use by " or "best before". Throw away anything you have kept for too long, or that looks or smells spoiled.
- Wash fruits and vegetables in lots of clean running water before eating. Peel and discard outer leaves or rinds. Thoroughly scrub vegetables if you want to eat the skin. Use a vegetable brush and water to scrub items with tough skin, such as melons, apples, or carrots, before cutting and serving raw. Smaller, more delicate fruits, such as berries, are easily rinsed in a colander thus

limiting the potential damage. Thorough washing removes harmful bacteria, viruses, and residues left on the surface.

- Wash produce just before it is used, not before putting it away. Wash hands thoroughly before handling produce. If you have been handling fresh meat and poultry, be sure to clean surfaces, utensils, and hands before handling fresh produce (or any other foods).
- Cover dishes made with cut fruits and vegetables. Leave prepared fruit salads and other cut produce in the refrigerator until serving. Discard these items if they have been out of the refrigerator for more than four hours.

Fresh fruit and vegetables are tasty and satisfying to eat and are essential in providing the necessary vitamins, minerals and fibre in our diet. Let's enjoy their wide variety everyday as part of a healthy diet.