



Shopping Safely

follow these shopping safety tips...

To keep your food safe, select and handle food carefully in the grocery store. Here are some things you can do when shopping.

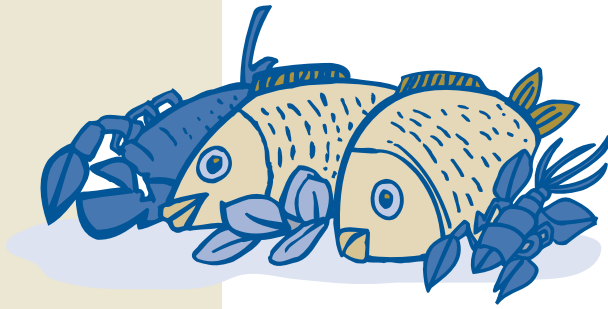
Look for cans without dents, cracks, or bulging lids.

Some stores sell dented cans at a discount. Even though these cans might be cheaper, they might be unsafe to eat. Canned food has been heated to a very high temperature to kill the bacteria that might be present. If the can is intact (no severe dents or openings), bacteria from the outside cannot get into the can and make it unsafe. However, some dented cans might have pinholes (so tiny they cannot be seen by the naked eye) that could allow bacteria to get into the food and grow. Cracks and bulging lids also might indicate the food was under-processed. Throw out foods that show these signs because they might contain the bacteria that cause botulism.



Avoid opened, torn, or damaged packages.

Again, some stores might sell these foods at a discount. They could be unsafe to eat. Torn or damaged packages allow bacteria and insects to get into food and contaminate it. If during storage a package tears, transfer the food to a plastic or glass container or put the package into a large plastic bag. This will protect the food from contaminants, such as bacteria and insects.



Check dates on foods.

Many products have dates on them. The date stamped on product packages indicate the product's freshness. A sell-by date tells the grocer and consumers how long the food should be kept for sale on the shelf. Grocers usually do not sell foods that are past their sell-by date. However, the food is usually safe to eat after the sell-by date passes if it has been handled safely.

A use-by date indicates how long the product will retain top eating quality after it is purchased. Food is safe to eat after the use by date passes but has a greatly reduced quality.

Pick up refrigerated and frozen foods last.

While cold food is sitting in your grocery cart, it can warm to unsafe temperatures. At unsafe temperatures, bacteria can grow. If bacteria grows too much, foodborne illness might result.

Do not let raw chicken, fish, and meat drip on other foods.

Wrap in separate plastic bags. Raw chicken, fish, and meat have bacteria on their surface and in their juice and so could contaminate other foods.

Take food straight home to the refrigerator.

Food should not be at room temperature for more than two hours. Never put foods in the trunk of your car. Sometimes the trunk can reach temperatures over 100°F.

Angela M. Fraser, Ph.D.
Department of Family
and Consumer Sciences
North Carolina
State University

This material is based upon work supported by the Cooperative State Research , Education, and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under Agreement No. 99-41560-0772. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.