



NEWS RELEASE

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Don't Forget Food Safety

Nationwide, 858,000 locations offer foodservice -- up from 491,000 in 1972, according to a 2002 report by the National Restaurant Association. Carolyn O'Neil, registered dietitian and national spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association (ADA)/ConAgra Foods Foundation Home Food Safety program, describes us as becoming a "... culture of 'diners-out' and 'takers-out.'" The potential for a food-related illness from improperly handled leftovers may be increasing.

It's hard to leave extra food behind at restaurants. An April 2002 survey by ADA and ConAgra Foods Foundation found 91 percent of Americans take leftovers home occasionally and 32 percent do so on a regular basis.

How safely are these leftovers handled by consumers? The ADA/ConAgra survey found consumers are still playing a guessing game as to proper temperatures for leftover storage and reheating, and determining if food is still edible. For example, the survey indicated:

- Fewer than 1 in 5 used a refrigerator thermometer to assure their refrigerator is at a safe temperature; 43 percent didn't know the correct temperature for refrigerator storage.
- 51 percent didn't know the proper temperature for reheating leftovers; 85 percent never used a meat thermometer.
- While food may spoil before it looks, smells or tastes bad, 48 percent relied on one or more of their senses to judge food safety.

O'Neil also warned against leaving leftovers out on the counter or under your desk for several hours. To handle leftovers safely, TWO hours is the maximum time perishable foods should be at room temperature, ONE hour if the temperature is 90 degrees F or above. For best quality and safety, eat leftovers in a day or two or freeze them for longer storage. Keep your refrigerator running at 40 degrees F or below. Reheat leftovers until they're steaming hot throughout, 165 degrees F.

If you're concerned about leftovers and don't feel you'll be able to refrigerate or eat them in a timely manner, ask about portion sizes BEFORE you order. USDA's publication "How Much Are You Eating," advises "If main dish portions are larger than you want, order an appetizer or side dish instead, or share a main dish with a friend."

BOTTOM LINE: If you feel you won't be able eat all of a food at a restaurant, you don't want to leave it behind and you can't refrigerate it within two hours, don't order it!

Source: *Food Reflections Newsletter, October 2002 by Alice Henneman, MS, RD, Extension Educator, ahenneman1@unl.edu; University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension - Lancaster County*