Food Safety Risks for Older Adults: Insights and Opportunities

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Overview

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A national leadership organization supporting the 5,000+ local, community-based Meals on Wheels programs across the country through advocacy, education, research and national partnerships and campaigns.
• Foodborne illnesses are a preventable and underreported public health problem.

• High burden on public health system and contribute significantly to the cost of health care.

• Large groups of the population are vulnerable to foodborne illness.
Nutrition Trends with Food Safety Implications

- Demographics
  - Density and Diversity (ethnicity, age, preferences)

- Globalization
  - Food supply

- Consumer Lifestyles and Expectations
  - Prevention, out of season eating, convenience, ubiquity

- Morbidity and Healthcare Expenditure
  - 48 million Americans (~17% of population)
Food Safety
Risk Factors

• Adults 65+ are at an increased risk of hospitalization and death from foodborne illness.

• There are several reasons for this:
  – Physiological
  – Medical
  – Behavioral
  – Physical
Risk Factors: Physiological

- Age-related changes to our olfactory, gustatory and digestive systems.

Risk Factors: Medical

• Older adults are more likely to have underlying chronic conditions, be a transplant recipient, and are also more likely to regularly take medications.

• Together, chronic conditions and some medications can further weaken the immune system.

Risk Factors: Medical

• Increased susceptibility to illness leading to increased hospital stays.

• Hospitalization exposes older adults to foodborne illness risks.
  – Increased risk of opportunistic infection;
  – Immobility to due extended hospital stays can also impair immune function.

Risk Factors: Behavioral

- Education should target behaviors most associated with increased likelihood of foodborne illness (FBD).
- Seniors are at increased risk of FBD because some:
  - Lifecourse experiences and learned behaviors
  - Perceptions of risk and food waste
  - Food label knowledge and usages

Risk Factors: Physical

- Focus: home-bound seniors
- Dependent on foods brought to the home by:
  - Home delivered meal programs,
  - Food delivery services
  - Family members
  - Own food supplies
- Food behaviors, availability of foods, in-home food preparation and storage facilities

Call to Action

• Effective interventions need to:
  – Tailor training to the learning needs of the older adults;
  – Stimulate risk perception related to food safety;
  – Develop skills on how to best adhere to recommended food safety practices;
  – Increase individual confidence in their capacity to develop better food safety practices;
  – Share resources from preferred sources.

Foods to Avoid for Older Adults

- Raw or undercooked meat, poultry, eggs and seafood.
- Unwashed fruits and vegetables
- Raw or unpasteurized milk
- Soft cheese (unless labeled “made with pasteurized milk’)
- Hot dogs, deli meat, and lunch meat (unless reheated to steaming hot)
- Unpasteurized refrigerated pâtés or meat spreads
- Raw sprouts (i.e., alfalfa, clover, and radish)


From Consumers to Chefs

Food Safety Education Matters
News Sources Impact Opinion on Food Safety

Generations influenced by different sources, with younger adults more influenced by family, doctors on TV or food companies.

Top Source of Influence on Opinion about Top Safety Concern

News article or headline, or news on TV: 50%
Friend or family member: 40%
Government agency (USDA, EPA, FDA, or CDC): 30%
Reading a scientific study: 20%
Doctor or nutritionist on TV or social media: 10%
Health-focused website: 0%
Conversation with personal healthcare professional: 0%
A food company or manufacturer: 0%
Conversation with registered dietitian nutritionist: 0%
Health, food or nutrition bloggers: 0%
Fitness, diet or nutrition mobile app: 0%
Conversation with wellness counselor or health coach: 0%
Conversation with fitness professional: 0%
Chef or culinary professional: 0%

Q52: What one source of information most influenced your opinion on [TOP FOOD SAFETY ISSUE]? (n=1,009)

2018 International Food Information Council Foundation Survey
Resources to Remember

- **Federal Government**
  - CDC, FDA, USDA-FSIS, SNAP-ED

- **Academic Institutions**
  - Cooperative Extension Services

- **Online Resource Centers**
  - National Resource Center on Nutrition and Aging
  - National Council on Aging – Center for Healthy Aging

- **Available Curricula**
  - Food Safety on the Go – MOWA/Univ. MD (Relaunch: September 2019)
  - Cooking Healthy, Eating Smart – Clemson University
References