



## Rinse fresh produce for safety's sake

**I'm trying to get my family to eat more fresh produce, but I'm concerned about safety. What can I do to make sure we don't get sick?**

First, your instincts are right: Eating more fruits and vegetables, not less, is the way to go. Higher consumption of fruits and vegetables is linked with lower rates of heart disease and cancer. Recommendations range from eating five to nine servings of plant-based foods every day.

However, consumers' awareness of risks posed by bacteria and viruses on fresh produce has increased substantially in the last few years. And no wonder: Several outbreaks have brought the issue to the headlines. A recent problem with salmonella on tomatoes from a line of convenience stores has just added to the list, including green onions and hepatitis A in 2003; cantaloupe and salmonella in 2002; raw sprouts and salmonella in 1999; lettuce and *E. coli* O157:H7 in 1999.

In fact, an analysis by the Center for Science in the Public Interest released in April 2004 reported that produce was responsible for 428 food-borne illness outbreaks and nearly 24,000 illnesses between

1990 and 2003. That's compared with about 12,000 illnesses linked to poultry and not quite 11,000 associated with beef. Clearly, consumers should do what they can to reduce their risk.

The problem, of course, is that fresh produce is usually eaten raw. Thorough cooking kills bacteria and viruses that cause illness, but no one wants to thoroughly cook the tomatoes for their salad — or the lettuce, for that matter.

That's why it's advisable to rinse fresh fruits and vegetables thoroughly before consuming them. That's true even for produce with inedible rinds, like cantaloupe or watermelon. When you cut such fruit into pieces, any contamination on the outside of the rind can easily be spread to the part you do eat.

In addition, be sure to wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils and counter tops often. They can become contaminated and spread the problem to anything that comes in contact with them. Use hot soapy water, then sanitize with a mixture of 1 teaspoon of chlorine bleach in a quart of water.

*Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or [filipic.3@osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@osu.edu).*



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### **Editor:**

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