

# University health officials offer students leftover tips

By following these tips, students can reduce the risks of foodborne illnesses

By Lisa Toth  
Oregon Daily Emerald

Opening the refrigerator has the potential of letting loose the overpowering, horrid odor seeping from a resealable plastic container.

The container holds indistinguishable, moldy contents.

And its smell saturates the other produce piled up on top of it, on the very back of the shelf.

Whether the contents were remnants of a doggie bag gone bad or a dinner long forgotten, the refrigerator door is shut as quickly as it was opened.

Despite the risk of leftovers turning sour in the fridge, some college students habitually keep such foods for weeks. But University officials and students have devised a variety of ways to reduce the risks of foodborne illnesses caused by bacteria.

Health Educator Kristen Olmos with the University Health Center said people have a tendency to keep food in the refrigerator longer than they should. She added that certain foods keep longer than others. Ice cream, for example, can stay in the freezer for one month. While mayonnaise lasts in the refrigerator for two months, fresh poultry can only stay in the refrigerator for one or two days before contracting such common bacteria as *E. coli*, salmonella and listeria.

"I don't think people should be afraid of what they eat," she said. "They should be mindful of what they eat."

She said many students will buy a pizza and throw it in the refrigerator, mistakenly thinking they can pull it out a week later and it will still be safe to eat. Olmos said after three or four days, items such as these should be tossed.

She advised grocery shopping students to do their errands first and hit the "outermost perimeter of the grocery store" for fresh items last, checking expiration dates during the process.

"A lot of people don't realize eggs have an expiration date," she said.

She added that, after grocery shopping, students should "do a once-over in your refrigerator" to weed out items that may have expired, especially because most students don't go shopping as often as a family of four.

Some local grocery stores sell food that has passed its expiration date for a cheaper price. Olmos said bread, crackers, rice and other foods that already have a long shelf life can still be purchased, even though "the quality might not be as good."

Students still have options for that food that has spoiled and fallen victim to mold. If there is mold on hard cheese, Olmos advised cutting off the mold at least one inch deeper than what is visible. Any other foods with mold on them should be discarded.

"We can have bad habits just as easily as we can have good habits," she said.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service, if it is suspected that a person has contracted a foodborne illness that item of food should be contained and medical professionals should be contacted. The incident may also need to be reported to the local health department.

Some 7 million Americans will suffer from foodborne illnesses every year because, at the right temperature, bacteria that can't be seen, smelled or tasted can multiply to millions in a few short hours. The



Adam Amato Emerald

Refrigerators, like this one, cannot preserve food indefinitely. Checking for mold and past expiration dates can reduce the chances of ingesting foodborne bacteria.

USDA reported that about 85 percent of cases could be avoided if people just handled food carefully.

Sophomore Maren Zielony said even when she puts leftovers in the refrigerator, her boyfriend usually eats them within a couple of hours, so spoilage isn't much of a problem. But if her food has been in the refrigerator for more than a few days, Zielony offered another solution that keeps her out of danger.

"Sometimes I ask someone else to taste it without telling them," she said.

Like many consumers, Zielony said she looks for an expiration date that is the furthest away as possible.

The University also has rules for students who do their grocery shopping in the residence hall dining facilities. Olmos and Food Services Director Tom Driscoll said residence hall dining follows current Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point guidelines for safe food handling. The HACCP program was established in the 1970s by NASA to make sure food rocketed into outer space with astronauts was safe, Driscoll said.

He said the food services staff monitor the temperature of food they serve every two hours. They feed about 3,000 people three meals a day, and all employees have passed a state food handlers test.

Sponges, for example, which Driscoll described as a "big, bacteria glob" are prohibited in the kitchen, and sanitized towels are used instead.

"Food safety is kind of like putting your seat belt on in the car," Driscoll said. "You don't expect anything to happen, but it could happen."

Driscoll said foodborne illnesses have only been an occasional problem, and he said he has yet to receive multiple calls reporting problems with food that is served.

"That's the call you hope you don't get," Driscoll said.

The food services staff works to maintain safe food temperatures

## A Quick Guide to Safe Food Handling

When it doubt, throw it out.

**Danger** — never taste food that looks or smells strange to see if it can still be used. Just discard it.

**Is it moldy?** The visible mold is only the tip of the iceberg. The poisons molds can form are found under the surface of the food. So, while sometimes hard cheese, salamis and firm fruits and vegetables can be saved by cutting the mold out — remove a large area around it. Most molding food should be discarded.

**Freeze fresh meat, poultry or fish** immediately if they are not going to be used within a few days.

**Put packages** of raw meat, poultry or fish on a plate before refrigerating so their juices won't drip on other food. Raw juices often contain bacteria.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service

when transporting meals, both hot and cold, Driscoll said. He added that most of the leftovers from the central kitchen in Carson dining hall are donated to Food for Lane County.

"They (Food for Lane County) have a stringent process of making sure that food is safe," he said.

But not everyone is quite as careful with how they handle their food. While freshman Stephen Mouillesseaux said he doesn't have a refrigerator in his Schafer Hall room, he has still found a way to preserve his food. The theater arts major said he makes a weekly Saturday night visit to Grab 'N Go and spends his points on drinks, snacks and fruit — and then puts them on the window ledge in his room to eat at a later time.

"There's enough of a draft that everything stays fresh," he said.

E-mail features/Pulse editor Lisa Toth at lisatoth@dailyemerald.com.

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Ron Witte  
Assistant professor of Architecture  
Harvard Graduate School of Design  
Principal @ WW firm Cambridge, MA

**WHEN:**  
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**WHERE:**  
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