



NORTH
DAKOTA

FNP News

Family
Nutrition
Program

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Questions and
Answers ...

Keeping Fruits and Vegetables Safe to Eat

Happy spring!

The grass is starting to grow, and soon spring flowers will brighten the outdoors. Now is a great time to brighten your plate with some of the fresh produce that's coming into season. Strawberries, spinach and lettuce, for example, usually are at their best quality and price at this time of the year.

Do you know how to keep your fresh produce safe to eat?

How should I clean fresh fruits and vegetables?

Use plenty of running water and a produce brush, if necessary, to clean fresh produce. Don't use bleach, soap or other detergents on fresh produce because these cleansers aren't meant to be eaten!

I'm planning a graduation party. One thing we'll be serving is cut-up fruit. How long is cut-up fruit safe?

Refrigerate all cut, peeled or cooked fresh fruits and vegetables within two hours. When serving, "nesting" bowls of cut-up fruit in larger bowls filled with ice also is a good idea.

Is it safe to eat the bruised parts of fruits and vegetables?

It's safest to remove and throw away bruised or damaged parts of fruits and vegetables. Those parts are most likely to contain "germs." Be sure to check fresh fruits and vegetables for bruises and other damage at the store.

Why are some fruits and vegetables "waxed"? Is the "wax" safe to eat?

Waxing helps keep fruits and vegetables fresh. It protects them from losing moisture and helps prevent bruising and mold growth. The wax is safe to eat, and only a tiny amount is used. The body doesn't digest wax. If you prefer unwaxed produce, check if the store where you shop offers unwaxed produce. You also can peel the produce, but you'll lose fiber and nutrients.

Do bagged salads that are labeled "ready to eat" need to be washed?

Packaged fruits and vegetables that are labeled "washed," "triple washed" or "ready to eat" do not need to be washed.



Six steps to safer
fruits and vegetables

My mother gave me some brown rice, but I'm not sure how to prepare it. Is it as nutritious as white rice?

Brown rice is prepared like white rice, but it takes longer to cook. Brown rice is higher in fiber than white rice, and it has a slightly nutty flavor that adds variety to your menus. It's a good source of B vitamins, magnesium, phosphorus and other nutrients. To prepare 3 cups of cooked rice, mix 1 cup raw rice with 2 cups water in saucepan. Heat until it starts to boil. Reduce heat to simmer. Stir. Cover pan and allow to simmer without stirring for 15 to 20 minutes for white rice or 45 to 50 minutes for brown.

I'm trying to use herbs and spices to cut down on fat and salt. How long do spices last?

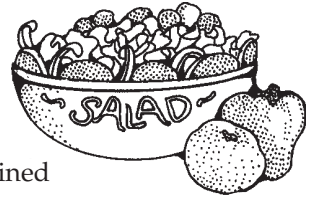
Try the "sniff test." Crush a small amount and sniff to see if it smells fresh. Check ground seasonings every six months. If they have little aroma, they'll provide little flavor!

If properly stored in air-tight containers in a cool, dry place, ground spices will remain flavorful for about three years, and whole spices about four years.



Taco Salad

- 1 small head of lettuce, torn into small pieces
- 2 fresh tomatoes, chopped
- ½ c. chopped green pepper
- 1 lb. ground beef or ground turkey
- 1 15.5-oz. can pinto beans, drained (or 2 cups cooked beans)
- 1 small onion, chopped
- ¾ c. salsa or taco sauce
- Baked tortilla chips (optional)
- Shredded cheese (optional)



Wash produce well before cutting. Put lettuce in large bowl. Add tomatoes and green pepper. Brown meat and onion in frying pan. Drain off fat and liquid. Mix meat, beans and salsa. Add to salad mixture. Serve with additional salsa and top with baked tortilla chips and shredded cheese.

Makes 6 servings.

Without chips and cheese, each 2-cup serving has 230 calories, 11 grams fat and 5 grams of fiber. The recipe is an excellent source of vitamins A and C.