Follow food safety guidelines with bagged salad greens

It seems every few months the news is saturated with concerns about the safety of the food consumers buy. Once again bagged, prewashed salad greens are making news.

This time it is not for a foodborne illness outbreak, but a study conducted by national consumer magazine did a study to learn the microbial count on packaged greens, said Barbara Brown, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension food specialist.

The study found bacteria that increase the risk of illness. In some cases the bacteria levels found were very high. Results also varied widely from sample to sample, from brand to brand, and even from bag to bag of the same brand.

The study showed that bags of greens that were closer to their use-by date contained higher levels of bacteria than those that were further away. The type of package, whether it is a plastic bag or plastic box, did not make any difference.

Researchers at the University of Georgia studied E. coli contamination on lettuce and learned that the bacteria cells attach to the surface and inside the holes the various lettuce varieties use to breath. They also found E. coli cells in higher numbers on cut edges of lettuce pieces and in bruised areas.

Brown said consumers can reduce their risk of illness from bacteria, including E. coli, by washing salad greens before using them.

“This includes those greens that are packaged as ‘prewashed’ or ‘triple washed.’ Rinse lettuce just before serving because bacteria grow more quickly in greens that are stored wet,” she said. “If you need to clean it ahead of time, be sure to dry the greens well either in a salad spinner or pat dry with a clean towel.”

To clean greens the right way, Brown said to start with clean hands. Wash your hands for 20 seconds with warm water and soap before handling the greens. In addition, wash out your sink with a sanitizing solution of one teaspoon bleach mixed into one quart of water.

Wash the greens in a sink full of fresh, cool water, swishing with your hands. Lift greens from the water and drain in a colander. Repeat the process with clean water until no grit remains. Washing with soap, detergent, vinegar or produce washes is not recommended.

Cut away damaged, rusted and wilted pieces, along with those that look slimy. Dry the lettuces before using in a salad as dressing will slide off wet leaves. Be sure to store salad in the refrigerator.

“While there’s no absolute way to eliminate the risk of foodborne illness associated with greens, following these few steps can help consumers reduce the risk of getting sick,” Brown said.
Poison Prevention Week
March 14-20, 2010

How Toxic Are Your Cleaning Supplies?
When consumers buy commercial cleaning products, we expect them to do one thing: clean. We use a wide array of scents, soaps, detergents, bleaching agents, softeners, scourers, polishes, and specialized cleaners for bathrooms, glass, drains and ovens to keep our homes sparkling and sweet-smelling. But, while the chemicals in these products make our dishes, bathtubs, and countertops gleaming and germ-free, many also contribute to indoor air pollution, are poisonous if ingested, and harmful if inhaled or touched. In fact, some cleaners are among the most toxic products found in the home.

In 2000, cleaning products were responsible for nearly 10 percent of all toxic exposures reported to U.S. Poison Control Centers, accounting for 206,636 calls.

Cleaning ingredients vary in the health hazard they pose. Some cause acute, or immediate, hazards, such as skin or respiratory irritation, watery eyes, or chemical burns, while others are associated with chronic, or long-term, effects such as cancer.

If you have questions, call Oklahoma Poison Control at (800) 522-0206. To report hazardous products, call the Department of Environmental Quality at (800) 522-4611. To report hazardous household chemicals, including ingredients and the nature of the risk.

Air fresheners may contain any of a number of dangerous chemicals. Formaldehyde irritates the lungs and mucous membranes, and may cause cancer. Petroleum distillates are flammable, irritate the eyes, skin, and lungs and may cause fatal pulmonary edema in sensitive individuals. Some air fresheners contain p-dichlorobenzene, a toxic irritant. The aerosol propellants used in some products can be flammable and can cause nervous system damage if inhaled.

Rat poisons (rodenticides) are less lethal than they used to be, but remain toxic to people and pets. Most rodenticides contain warfarin, a chemical that causes internal bleeding if ingested.

Ammonia is a volatile compound that can irritate the respiratory system and mucous membranes if inhaled, cause a chemical burn if it is spilled on skin, and react with chlorinated products (e.g., bleach) to produce deadly chloramines gas.

Antifreeze is ethylene glycol, that is poisonous if swallowed. Breathing it can cause dizziness. Drinking antifreeze can cause serious brain, heart, kidney, and other internal organ damage, or death. Ethylene glycol has a sweet flavor, so it is attractive to kids and pets. Antifreeze typically contains a chemical to make it taste bad, but the flavor is not always sufficient deterrent. The sweet smell is enough to lure pets.

Household bleach contains sodium hypochlorite, a chemical that can cause irritation and damage to the skin if spilled on it and the respiratory system if inhaled. Never mix bleach with ammonia or with toilet bowl cleaners or drain cleaners, as dangerous and possibly deadly fumes can be produced.

Drain cleaners typically contain lye (sodium hydroxide) or sulfuric acid. Either is capable of causing an extremely serious chemical burn if splashed on the skin. They are toxic to drink. Splashing drain cleaner in the eye can cause blindness.

Laundry detergents contain a variety of chemicals. Cationic agents, if ingested, can cause nausea, vomiting, convulsion, and coma. Non-ionic detergents are irritants. Many people experience chemical sensitivity to dyes and perfumes present in some detergents.

Mothballs are made either of p-dichlorobenzene or naphthalene. Both chemicals are toxic and cause dizziness, headaches, and irritation to the eyes, skin, and respiratory system. Prolonged exposure can lead to liver damage and cataracts.

Exposure to the hydrocarbons in motor oil can cause cancer. Many people are unaware that motor oil contains heavy metals that can damage the nervous system and other organs.

The danger from oven cleaner depends on its composition. Some oven cleaners contain sodium hydroxide or potassium hydroxide – extremely corrosive strong bases. These can be deadly if swallowed. They can cause chemical burns on the skin or in the lungs if the fumes are inhaled.

Wiper fluid is toxic if you drink it, plus some of the poisonous chemicals are absorbed through skin, so it is toxic to touch. Swallowing ethylene glycol can cause brain, heart, and kidney damage, and possibly death. Inhalation can cause dizziness. The methanol in wiper fluid can be absorbed through the skin, inhaled, or ingested, and damages the brain, liver, and kidneys, and can cause blindness. The isopropyl alcohol acts as a central nervous system depressant, causing drowsiness, unconsciousness, and potentially death.
Home Cleaning Chemicals and Asthma

We’ve all done it. We’re cleaning the bathroom with a household cleaner, such as those that contain bleach, thinking that we’re doing a good thing. Suddenly, you take a deep breath, accidentally inhale some of the aerosol, and can’t stop coughing. Could this actually lead to asthma?

Quite possibly so. A study published in 2007 looked at the association between the use of household cleaners and the development of asthma. This study, which was performed in Europe, included more than 3,500 people who frequently used various household cleaners. None of the people had asthma at the beginning of the study.

For those people who used household cleaners at least once a week, asthma symptoms occurred 50 percent more often than was expected for people without exposure to these chemicals. When household cleaners were used four or more days a week, asthma symptoms were more than twice as likely to develop.

The household cleaners most likely to result in asthma symptoms were glass cleaners, furniture polish, and air fresheners. Only the spray forms of the cleaners caused the problems.

The moral of the story? Protect yourself. Read the labels, especially the warnings. Be very careful when you use household cleaners. Never mix one with another. And keep them safely away from children and pets.

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Online Information: Can You Trust It?

A group of older adults are gathered for their weekly computer class. They are learning to use the Internet to find health information. Maria’s husband had a stroke the month before so she’s searching the web for some basic facts about stroke rehabilitation. Walter has questions about what causes Alzheimer’s disease because he thinks that’s what his mother had. Shirley and Howard are trying to find out if the cataract surgery their eye doctor suggests really is as safe as he says. The whole group has one big worry—“How can we trust the health information we get on the Internet?”

There are thousands of health-related websites on the Internet. Some of the information on these websites is reliable. Some is not. Some of the information is current. Some is not. Choosing which website to trust is worth thinking about.

How do I find reliable health information online?

As a rule, health websites sponsored by Federal government agencies are good sources of health information. You can reach all Federal websites by visiting www.usa.gov. Large professional organizations and well-known medical schools may also be good sources of health information.

Places To Start

An excellent source of reliable information is the National Institutes of Health (www.nih.gov). You can start here to find information on almost every health topic, including:

- heart disease (www.nhlbi.nih.gov)
- deafness (www.nidcd.nih.gov)
- dentures (www.nidcr.nih.gov)
- Alzheimer’s disease (www.alzheimers.nia.nih.gov)

In addition, you can visit the National Library of Medicine’s Medline Plus (www.medlineplus.gov) for dependable information on more than 700 health topics.

You can also visit NIHSeniorHealth.gov (www.nihseniorhealth.gov)—a website with health information designed specifically for older people.

What questions should I ask?

As you search online, you are likely to find websites for many health agencies and organizations that are not well-known. By answering the following questions you should be able to find more information about these websites. A lot of these details can be found under the heading, “About Us” or “Contact Us.”

1. **Who sponsors the website? Can you easily identify the sponsor?**
   Websites cost money—is the funding source readily apparent? Sometimes the website address itself may help—for example:

   .gov identifies a government agency
   .edu identifies an educational institution
   .org identifies professional organizations (e.g., scientific or research societies, advocacy groups)
   .com identifies commercial websites (e.g., businesses, pharmaceutical companies, sometimes hospitals)
2. *Is it obvious how you can reach the sponsor?*  
Trustworthy websites will have contact information for you to use. They often have a toll-free telephone number. The website home page should list an e-mail address, phone number, or a mailing address where the sponsor and/or the authors of the information can be reached.

3. *Who wrote the information?*  
Authors and contributors should be identified. Their affiliation and any financial interest in the content should also be clear. Be careful about testimonials. Personal stories may be helpful, but medical advice offered in a case history should be considered with a healthy dose of skepticism. There is a big difference between a website developed by a person with a financial interest in a topic versus a website developed using strong scientific evidence. Reliable health information comes from scientific research that has been conducted in government, university, or private laboratories.

4. *Who reviews the information? Does the website have an editorial board?*  
Click on the “About Us” page to see if there is an editorial board that checks the information before putting it online. Find out if the editorial board members are experts in the subject you are researching. For example, an advisory board made up of attorneys and accountants is not medically authoritative. Some websites have a section called, “About Our Writers” instead of an editorial policy. Dependable websites will tell you where the health information came from and how it has been reviewed.

5. *When was the information written?*  
New research findings can make a difference in making medically smart choices. So, it’s important to find out when the information you are reading was written. Look carefully on the home page to find out when the website was last updated. The date is often found at the bottom of the home page. Remember: older information isn’t useless. Many websites provide older articles so readers can get an historical view of the information.

6. *Is your privacy protected? Does the website clearly state a privacy policy?*  
Take time to read the website’s policy—if the website says something like, “We share information with companies that can provide you with products,” that’s a sign your information isn’t private. Do not give out your Social Security number. If you are asked for personal information, be sure to find out how the information is being used by contacting the website sponsor by phone, mail, or the “Contact Us” feature on the website. Be careful when buying things on the Internet. Websites without security may not protect your credit card or bank account information. Look for information saying that a website has a “secure server” before purchasing anything online.

7. *Does the website make claims that seem too good to be true? Are quick, miraculous cures promised?*  
Be careful of claims that any one remedy will cure a lot of different illnesses. Be skeptical of sensational writing or dramatic cures. Make sure you can find other websites with the same information. Don’t be fooled by a long list of links—any website can link to another, so no endorsement can be implied from a shared link. Take the “too good to be true” test—information that sounds unbelievable probably is unbelievable.

**A final note**

Use your common sense and good judgment when evaluating health information online. There are websites on nearly every conceivable health topic and no rules overseeing the quality of the information. Take a deep breath and think a bit before acting on any health information you find on the web. Don’t count on any one website. If possible, check with several sources to confirm the accuracy of your results. And remember to talk with your doctor.
Haiti Earthquake: FTC Warns Consumers to Give Wisely – Avoid Fraudulent “Charities”

In the wake of the devastation caused by the earthquake in Haiti, the Federal Trade Commission warns consumers to choose carefully when considering appeals for aid in the news, online, and at social networking sites. The best way to provide immediate help is to donate money directly to established national relief organizations that have the experience and means to deliver aid.

The FTC, the nation’s consumer protection agency, has these tips to help consumers give wisely:

Donate to recognized charities. Watch out for those that have sprung up overnight. They may be well-meaning, but lack the infrastructure to provide assistance. Be wary of charities with names that sound like familiar or nationally known organizations. Some phony charities use names that sound or look like those of respected, legitimate organizations.

You don’t have to donate to someone who contacts you by unsolicited e-mail, phone call, or text message. It’s better to give through a Web site or phone number that you know is legitimate.

Give directly to the charity, not the solicitors for the charity. Solicitors take a portion of the proceeds to cover their costs, which leaves less for victim assistance.

Do not give out personal or financial information— including your Social Security Number or credit card and bank account numbers— to anyone who solicits a contribution from you. Scam artists use this information to commit fraud against you.


Don’t give or send cash. For security and tax purposes, contribute by check or credit card. Write the official name of the charity on your check. You can contribute safely online through national charities like www.redcross.org/donate.

Ask for identification if you’re approached in person. Many states require paid fund-raisers to identify themselves as such and to name the charity for which they are soliciting.

Foods for Thought

What if we could be smarter – just by eating breakfast? Thinking is a biochemical process. The human brain, which is roughly 60 percent fat and uses about 20 percent of our daily calories, relies on a constant supply of glucose to function efficiently. When glucose levels drop, the symptom is confused thinking. On the other hand, high blood sugar is associated with elevated cortisol, a hormone known to impair memory (in high doses).

Certain foods have been shown to boost alertness, memory and stress resistance, and it is now known that mood and mental performance are strongly affected by B vitamins. Research suggests also that foods containing omega-3 fatty acids, are necessary for optimal brain function.

Some brain foods are better than others. Here are a few that rank high on most lists of the best-known brain foods:

Eggs. Eggs enhance many “executive” brain functions. Having a high proportion of nutrients to calories – a large egg has 70 calories and provides 13 essential nutrients – eggs are rich in choline, a fat-like B vitamin. Choline plays an essential role in the development of brain motor functioning and memory. Choline supplementation also minimizes fatigue.

Coffee. The popular beverage has recently been found to be the leading source of antioxidants in the average adult American’s diet. Much like its cousin, the cacao bean, the coffee bean is loaded with antioxidants, amino acids, vitamins, and minerals. Studies have shown that regular coffee consumption may actually reduce the risk of mental decline and such brain-related diseases as dementia and Alzheimer’s. However, loading that cup of Joe with sugary additives can cancel the healthy benefits – and pack on the pounds.

Blueberries. Got the blues because you forgot where you placed your keys? Compounds in blueberries have been proven to reverse short-term memory loss, as well as increase the number of cells in the hippocampus – the part of the brain responsible for memory. Slow on the uptake? Blueberries have also been known to prevent brain aging; they trigger specific neural pathways in the brain to enhance cognition and mental processing speed.
Fish. Eating fish – especially “oily” fish such as salmon and tuna, both of which are high in omega-3 fatty acids fights aging in the brain and significantly reduces cognitive decline in older adults. High fish consumption has also been linked to lowered rates of depression and neurosis, and helps keep moods stabilized. Many people take fish oil supplements, proven to be as effective as actually eating fish.

Spinach. Spinach is, quite literally, brain food, feeding it vital nutrients and enzymes needed to strengthen synapses and produce healthy levels of neurotransmitters. Neurologists recommend eating spinach at least three times a week as brain food. However, because this little green genie is one of the most insecticide-laden veggies in the produce section, experts now suggest buying organic spinach.

Additionally, the folic acid found in spinach also helps control the amount of water retained by the body and helps eliminate bloating. Spinach consumption has also been linked to preventing dementia in women.

Avocados. Almost as good as blueberries for enhancing brain health, the monounsaturated fat-laden avocado promotes increased circulation and blood flow. Lower blood pressure levels benefit the brain and are linked to an increase in cognitive abilities and intelligence.

Other “good” brain foods include yogurt, wheat germ, walnuts, oatmeal, strawberries, broccoli, cantaloupe, cashews, and bananas. Are there “bad” brain foods? Of course! They include white bread, high-sugar drinks, corn syrup, artificial food colors, artificial sweeteners, junk sugars and hydrogenated fats.

When considering brain foods, it’s good to remember the old saw, “less is more.” Experts suggest that brainpower can be optimized through grazing: eating smaller, more frequent meals, say six 200 – to 300 – calorie meals over the course of a day.

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March 14, 2010
Daylight Savings Time Begins
Change your clocks
Change your batteries

March 20, 2010
Spring begins!

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Smart Strip Power Strip Shuts Off Juice

The Smart Strip power strip is a good investment for those looking to reduce their electric bill and impact on the environment.

Description
A surge protector, that turns off power to phantom energy users when they aren’t in use
Available in seven and ten-outlet models, with and without fax/modem protection
Provides 1225 joules of surge protection
Features a 45-degree, angled plug for space savings
Includes a 30-day unconditional return policy and a two-year guarantee against defects
Also includes a lifetime return policy for damage caused by a power surge

The Smart Strip power strip is indeed smart. Just plug your computer or TV into the first outlet, and all of your related accessories (printer, speakers, VCR, DVD player, etc.) into the remaining outlets; and the Smart Strip will automatically disable power to these items when your computer or TV is turned off – a simple way to eliminate the phantom energy users in your home. Then, turn your computer or TV back on the next time you need it, and your accessories will turn back on too.

Since the first outlet on the strip (the control outlet) receives constant power, you don’t have the hassle of reprogramming your TV each time you turn it on.

Need to maintain power to a DVR or modem? The Smart Strip has this covered too. Just plug these items into the designated "always hot" outlets, and they’ll receive a constant supply of power just like your computer or TV. This is one surge protector that can be customized to your needs, whatever they may be.

The Smart Strip costs more than other surge protectors – expect to pay somewhere between $32 and $43 – and is not readily available in stores. If you want one, you’ll need to shop online or specialty stores.

Pros
Saves electricity by eliminating phantom energy users
Protects electronics from power surges
Generous spacing between outlets
Customizable to your needs

Cons
More expensive than other surge protectors
Not readily available in retail stores
IS POPULARITY IMPORTANT?

Building Self-esteem

Pay attention to behavior you like to see.
Comment on it.
Reward it.

Most parents want their children to be well-liked, but struggle with knowing what to do when their child claims "no one likes me." The need for recognition, companionship and acceptance is important during developmental years. Parents can help, but should not do the work for the child.

In many of today's neighborhoods, playgrounds are deserted. While this is an obvious lack of physical activity, the decreasing importance of play also decreases a child’s opportunity to learn to give and take; test leadership and problem solving skills; and practice learning how to get along with other people. Parents are encouraged to be watchful, particularly if they notice dramatic changes in their child’s behavior. A prolonged silence for a normally talkative child or a desire to spend more time alone are examples of behaviors that may be cause for concern.

Be positive, yet realistic. Encourage positive behaviors – help the child build self-esteem by strengthening his or her interests and skills. If children can learn to be comfortable with who they are, they will have the foundation that can help them build successful relationships.