

Breakfast or Anytime: How to Enjoy Eggs Safely



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However you take your eggs, make sure you enjoy them safely. It is important to take special care when handling and preparing fresh eggs to avoid getting sick from Salmonella Enteritidis. While eggs are one of nature's most nutritious and economical foods, egg-associated salmonellosis is a serious public health problem in the United States and several European countries. In the United States, we have estimated that one in 50 consumers could be exposed to a contaminated egg each year. If that egg is pooled with many other eggs, not fully cooked, or held at a warm temperature allowing the Salmonella germs to multiply, it can make many people ill.

A bacterium, Salmonella Enteritidis, can be inside perfectly normal eggs, and if the eggs are eaten raw or undercooked, the bacterium can cause illness. A person infected with Salmonella Enteritidis usually has fever, abdominal cramps, and diarrhea beginning 12 to 72 hours after consuming a contaminated food or beverage. The illness usually lasts 4 to 7 days, and most persons recover without antibiotic treatment. However, the diarrhea can be severe, and hospitalization may be required. If you think you or a family member may have become ill from eating a contaminated egg, contact your health care provider. "Certain groups are at higher risk," says Dr. Casey Barton Behravesh, with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). "Infants, the elderly, and those with weaker immune systems are at increased risk for getting a Salmonella infection, as well as increased risk for having a more serious illness than can result in hospitalizations or even death."

According to Dr. Barton Behravesh, there are simple things you can do to enjoy eggs safely. Shell eggs are safest when stored in the refrigerator thoroughly cooked, and promptly

consumed. The larger the number of Salmonella present in the egg, the more likely it is to cause illness. Keeping eggs refrigerated prevents any Salmonella present in the eggs from multiplying, so eggs should be held refrigerated until they are needed. Also, it is important to wash hands and all food contact surface areas (counter tops, utensils, and cutting boards) with soap and water after contact with raw eggs. Then, disinfect the food contact surfaces using a sanitizing agent, such as bleach, following label instructions. Thoroughly cooking an egg kills all the harmful bacteria; "partially" cooking an egg means that some harmful bacteria can survive which can cause illness. Both undercooked egg whites and yolks have been associated with outbreaks of Salmonella Enteritidis infections. Do not keep eggs warm or at room temperature for more than 2 hours.

Avoid eating raw eggs, undercooked eggs, and restaurant dishes made with raw or undercooked, unpasteurized eggs. If you like your eggs runny or cook a recipe that typically calls for raw eggs (such a Hollandaise sauce or a Caesar salad dressing) make sure you use only pasteurized eggs.

Egg Basics: Thorough cooking is an important step in making sure eggs are safe.

- **Scrambled eggs:** Cook until firm, not runny.
- **Fried, poached, boiled, or baked:** Cook until both the white and the yolk are firm.
- **Egg mixtures, such as casseroles:** Cook until the center of the mixture reaches **160 °F** when measured with a food thermometer.

Food preparers should follow the easy lessons of "Clean, Separate, Cook, and Chill":

Clean - Wash hands, utensils, and cutting boards before and after contact with raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs to avoid spreading bacteria when preparing food.

Separate - Use different cutting boards for meat, poultry, seafood, and vegetables and keep raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs apart from foods that won't be cooked.

Cook – Use a food thermometer - you can't tell if a food item is done by how it looks.

Chill - Keep your refrigerator at 40 degrees or below to keep bacteria from growing and chill leftovers and takeout foods within 2 hours.

So however you take your eggs, make sure you enjoy them safely. For more information, talk to your state health department, visit www.cdc.gov/salmonella/enteritidis, or contact CDC at 1-800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636).