

MEDICAL MINUTE

TREAT YOUR FOOD RIGHT – OR IT CAN KILL YOU!



Here are some strategies for food storage that will make your groceries last longer—and help you avoid spending quality time getting acquainted with your toilet.

1. Use the right containers for leftovers.

Since those nasty microplastics are in (duh) plastic containers—and as you know from a past *Medical Minute*, they can build up in your body and interfere with how your cells function—opt for glass, ceramic, or metal containers instead. Glass and ceramic are perfectly safe for reheating. Obviously, metal is not safe unless you need an excuse to buy a new microwave. If you microwave your leftovers in plastic, though, you might be giving your lasagna a side of melted chemicals. That's not the seasoning anyone asked for.

2. Flour is a raw food that can harbor *E. coli* and *Salmonella*.

Really? Flour? The most dangerous thing about flour should be trying to clean it off a black shirt.

Store it in an airtight container so moisture can't sneak in and encourage mold. That should be easy for us Floridians... since we have absolutely no humidity whatsoever. (I'll wait until everyone stops laughing.) Wash your hands after handling flour, and whatever you do, don't eat raw cookie dough or cake batter. Well... there goes one of life's greatest pleasures. I usually make a double batch of cookie dough—one batch for the oven and one batch that somehow never makes it that far.

3. Keep your fruits and veggies separated.

Some fruits—like apples, peaches, and cantaloupe—give off ethylene gas as they ripen. That gas speeds up the aging of vegetables like carrots, and lettuce and broccoli (which, depending on your feelings about broccoli, may not sound like a problem). And two of my favorites...onions and potatoes... they are the ultimate odd couple. Onions make potatoes sprout, and potatoes make onions turn brown. It's basically a toxic relationship... and now they need separate living arrangements.

4. Leftovers don't last forever.

Even if you're great about putting leftovers away quickly, they still have an expiration date. Most cooked meats—and yes, pizza counts as a major food group—are only considered safe for about 3 to 4 days. Three to four days? If I followed that rule exactly, I'd probably throw away enough leftovers to feed all my neighbors. But before you tell me you use the sniff test, the fuzzy-food test, or the "just one little bite won't hurt" test... remember, those aren't actually food safety guidelines—they're just the way many of us have been living dangerously for years. Take that 007!

One exception: if hard cheese gets a little moldy, you can cut at least an inch around and below the mold and the rest is good to go! That's about the only food where "just cut the bad part off" is real advice instead of wishful thinking.